8-31-2014

Lusitania: An Examination of Captaincy and Seamanship in the Face of Disaster

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LUSITANIA:

AN EXAMINATION OF CAPTAINCY AND SEAMANSHIP IN THE FACE OF DISASTER

A Thesis Presented

by

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Submitted to the Office of Graduate Students,
University of Massachusetts Boston,
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2014

History Program

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ABSTRACT

LUSITANIA:

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August 2014

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Directed by Professor Paul Bookbinder

The last voyage of the *RMS Lusitania* is examined. The Cunard liner left New York for Liverpool on May 1, 1915 as the conflict in Europe began to escalate. The research separates the act of war from the actions of the ship's command and control infrastructure and the seamanship of its crew. This distinction is made under a thesis that more lives could have and *should have* been saved. The central question of the research was therefore: to what extent should the captain and crew of *RMS Lusitania* be held to account for the elevated loss of life in the hostile sinking of the *Lusitania* on May 7, 1915

and to what degree did this singular tragedy influence American public opinion toward the War.

ACKNOWLEGMENTS

This research recognizes that previous scholarship regarding the sinking of the *Lusitania* focused primarily on role of government in times of war and the complicit accountabilities for the sinking of a passenger ship. Historical records indicate that after World War I hostilities were brought to an end, Germany was formally determined to have been responsible for the sinking of the luxury passenger liner and the 1,198 lives that were lost. However, the political outcry and nationalistic demands for retribution in 1915 shaped the speed, scope, and (most likely) the outcomes of the public and private inquiry into the disaster. In the ensuing years, many military historians have concluded that Germany's unrestricted submarine warfare was a primary catalyst for America's entrance into the War. The sinking of the *Lusitania* was an early and devastating expression of Germany's new policy that directly impacted the United States.

The objective of this research is to separate the act of war from the actions of the ship's command and control infrastructure and the seamanship of its crew. This distinction was made under a thesis that more lives could have and *should have* been saved.

This research augments previous studies of the *Lusitania* and enhances or expands our historical understanding of the disaster. While histories of the *Lusitania* do not lay culpability at the feet of the crew and captain, this research found that both should be

held to account for the elevated loss of life in the hostile sinking of the ship on May 7, 1915.

PREFACE

The research method applied to this thesis involved primary English language sources from four countries including Great Britain, Ireland, and the United States, as well as translated documents from Germany's war archives. Digitized versions of archived transcripts from various inquiries immediately following the disaster are also utilized in this research. In addition, critical primary sources cited in the research include firsthand accounts cataloged from adult and adolescent survivors. Their recollections of the pandemonium, the seamanship, and at times selfless heroism observed throughout the ship is occasionally referenced. In addition, the ships' logs of both the *Lusitania* and U-20 were thoroughly researched. By combining first hand accounts, ships logs, and testimony taken immediately following the *Lusitania* disaster, an intimate and unique understanding of the accountability of the captain and crew is contributed to the body of research already available to historians.

Cunard company archival records located primarily in Liverpool, England were also researched to the fullest extent possible. This yielded details into how officers and crews were trained during the period and what precautions the Company mandated under circumstances of wartime operations. Cunard records also shed light on the liabilities and exposure the Company had at the time with regard to legal action from passengers and/or their families. The extent of that exposure and the means by which it was ultimately

remediated may reflect the accountability the company was perceived to place on its captain and crew. The career progressions of key employees such as Captain Turner were also be explored both before and after the accident and any changes in progression duly noted as an indicator of internal perceptions of competency.

An analysis of how the conditions aboard the mortally damaged vessel exacerbated the breakdown in morale, crew training and the subsequent heavy loss of life will be reconstructed. A comparative study of similar examples of torpedoed passenger vessels will provide some calibrating reference to crew actions and attending losses. The fact remains that a large amount of material has already been written on the *Lusitania* but none so far has gone into too much detail regarding the actions of company executives before and after the tragedy, crew training and morale, the sometimes heavy-handed actions of Captain Turner and the men under his command during the tragedy.

Some access to the war records involving Britain's Naval High Command was considered in this research. However, most of the Admiralty's record remains classified. A research trip to Liverpool (home of the Cunard Archives) is planned, but unfortunately will have to supplement the publication of this research. However, an understanding of what was ordered by the Admiralty was discoverable and proved essential to informing our primary thesis. One theory offered by some historians is that the *Lusitania* was sacrificed by desperate European leaders in the hope that the scope of the tragedy would infuriate a sleeping nation and help change the course of the First World War.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The storied luxury liner *Lusitania* was torpedoed to its grave by a German submarine patrolling twelve miles off the coast of Kinsale, Ireland on May 7, 1915. Sailing from American shores with 128 American passengers, the *Lusitania's* tragedy and its immense loss of life may have catalyzed the American response to the war that would later become known as World War I. Most historians believe America's entrance into World War I had a definitive effect on the outcome of the conflict and the shape of postwar Europe. Therefore, fully understanding the dynamics as well as the outcomes of the *Lusitania* tragedy is essential to understanding the evolution of the First World War and that war's subsequent influence on the first half of the 20th century.

The ship sank in less than 20 minutes despite advanced engineering intended to make it virtually unsinkable. Very few of *Lusitania's* forty eight lifeboats were successfully deployed and 1198 of 1959 people aboard lost their lives, most never making it off the ship. *Lusitania's* captain, William Turner was counted among the survivors.

At the time of the attack, the *Lusitania* was traveling from New York bound for Liverpool, England. It was public knowledge that German submarines were deployed in a lethal blockade around the British Isles. The route to Liverpool that the *Lusitania* took placed it in harms way, although she was without escort at the time of attack. As was the practice in wartime, merchant and civilian ships were given both general and ship-specific instructions from the British Admiralty as to course headings, recent submarine activity, and evasive maneuvers.

Extensive research has been conducted regarding the sinking of the *Lusitania*. Questions regarding what sank the ship, what warnings were given, and whether the ship was carrying wartime or otherwise explosive cargo have all been thoroughly covered. Though in some cases, not all questions have been answered definitively.

The primary thesis of this research is that the derivative effect of the Lusitania's sinking – the reflexive response of the American public to end its wartime isolation – may have been tempered had the loss of life in the disaster (including 128 Americans) not been so great. The central question to be answered therefore is:

To what extent should the captain and crew of The RMS Lusitania be held to account for the elevated loss of life in the hostile sinking of the Lusitania on May 7, 1915?

To answer the central question, we must understand if a) the Captain and crew understood the threat, b) that they took all precautions that were available to them, c) they received and executed any orders from the Admiralty that conflicted with undertaking the precautions they believed necessary prior to being torpedoed, d) the ship's leadership and

crew organized to deploy safety measures effectively given the grave circumstances after being directed to abandon ship, and e) public sentiment in the United States towards the war changed materially after the incident.

The captain's awareness of the threat is fundamental to the central question. If the captain and crew were ignorant as to the threat of attack, their actions up to encountering the submarine can hardly be criticized and we are left with only the post-attack response to evaluate. Previous research indicates the Captain and his crew were well aware of the threat posed by German submarines.[1] Many passengers also expressed concern over the threat of submarine attack. Some canceled their passage.[2] The German consulate in New York City issued a clear warning days before Lusitania's departure that a blockade on Great Britain was in effect and that German vessels would consider any allied owned or operated ship passing through the blockade a target.[3]

Once knowledge of the threat of attack was established, the research considered what precautions were taken against those that were available. These included the compliance of the ship's cargo, the configuration of the ship's bulkhead doors to minimize flooding, the ship's course, speed, and position within the channel, and any requests for escort that had been issued and when they were made. To the extent that

[1] Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster: An Episode in Modern Warfare and Diplomacy* (New York: New York Free Press, 1975), 128-129.

[2] John Protasio, *The Day the World was Shocked: The Lusitania Disaster and its Influence on the Course of World War I*, (Havertown: Casemate Publishers, 2011), 9-20.

[3] Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster*, 70-74.

precautions taken did not exhaust those available to the Lusitania in 1915, the ships command or crew was held to account.

With the British Admiralty sending shore-to-ship messages and most ships with explicit instructions NOT to respond (and thereby giving positions away to the enemy) it is unclear as to whether any overriding government orders were sent, were received, or were responded to. This is a critical secondary question to this paper's thesis. If material orders were disobeyed, ignored, or poorly executed, then the accountability for the *extensive* loss of life rests squarely with the crew and its operating leadership. If, on the other hand, the orders were given, received, and executed, the accountability lay with the governments of the Allied forces under which whose protection the *Lusitania* sailed. The Americans refused to acknowledge the claims put forth by the German consulate as to its rights to blockade and to attack ships carrying neutral citizens with impunity. In effect, the American government refused to publicly acknowledge Germany's warning. After the incident, the American position only underscored the naive and potentially lethal delusion of neutrality.

The research also considered the response of the ship's personnel immediately following the torpedo strike. The central question as to whether or not casualties could have been materially reduced was perhaps most influenced by the crew's ability to transfer passengers off the ship quickly and safely. The crew's performance under the circumstances that were presented on that morning may be a most critical element in validating the central thesis.

Finally, an examination of American sentiment before and after *Lusitania* was destroyed was necessary to establish the role for which the liner's loss of life played in the American entrance into the war. Recognizing the American press as both a primary *influence* as well as a *registrar* of public sentiment, newspaper coverage of the *Lusitania* as well as various public proceedings were also analyzed.

The Threat

Previous research indicates that the Captain and his crew were well aware of the threat posed by German submarines. Many passengers also expressed concern over the threat of submarine attack. Some canceled their passage. The German consulate in New York City issued a clear warning days before the *Lusitania's* departure that a blockade of Great Britain was in effect and considered any allied ship passing through the blockade a target. Furthermore, British code-breakers had intercepted a German command to put three U-boats to sea with orders to "attack transport ships, merchant vessels, warships"[4] in the Bristol Channel. Finally, wireless warnings from shore had been sent (and acknowledged by *Lusitania*) indicating that a submarine had been sighted off the southern Irish coastline and that three civilian ships had already been attacked and sunk in the days leading up to May 7, 1915.

Despite the apparent awareness of the general threat, little research currently exists as to why more precautions weren't put in place prior to setting sail and as the *Lusitania* approached warzone waters. Some historians have suggested the *Lusitania* was

[4] Thomas Bailey and Herman Bauer and Walther Schwieger, "German Documents Relating to the Lusitania," *The Journal of Modern History 8* no.3 (1936): 324.

4

perhaps a pawn in the chess game between Germany and Great Britain. This paper only considered the extent to which precautions were – or were not - taken and will leave the motivations of the various parties to other historical scholars.

Precautions

Despite its status as an iconic target, the *Lusitania* was not afforded an escort. Rescue ships took hours to arrive on the scene to search for survivors. Controversy remains as to how a single torpedo could have brought down this mighty ship. It appears that wartime cargo was indeed in the hold and may have caused the second, more deadly blast. Had the contraband cargo been removed as a precaution prior to departure from New York, many more lives may have been saved and Germany's reasons for sinking her would have been made moot.

Orders

Historians point to two public inquiries held immediately after the sinking of the *Lusitania* as evidence that certain secret orders sent directly to Captain Turner from the British Admiralty were ignored by the ship's bridge.[5] At the time of the testimony, the alleged orders could not be revealed since England was still very much at war. This research contributes a more transparent set of evidence of what orders were received and acted upon by the Captain and crew.

Attack

[5] Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster*, 194-195.

German and British public war records have informed details of U-20's attack on the *Lusitania*. This includes the diary of German U-boat Captain Schwieger as well as the Mersey Inquiry; a public investigation conducted one month after the attack. Although the crew of the passenger liner had assumed the high alert stations ordered by Turner, only one seaman spotted the torpedo with sufficient time to have the ship take evasive action. Unfortunately, the alert was never acknowledged to have been received and the seaman subsequently left his post to warn other crew members –including his brother – who were below deck.[6]

For its part, the submarine crew was surprised by the appearance of the *Lusitania* in its periscope sight. The U-20's captain reported that he had not expected to see any shipping traffic in the area since his crew distinguished itself as an active predator by sinking two ships the day before. He would write in his diary at the time that finding the 30,000 ton passenger steamer anywhere other than the Northern Channel, "was a mystery." Furthermore, the ship had been dismissed when initially spotted as it was moving away from the U-20 at a speed nearly twice that of the submarine. The *Lusitania's* sudden change in course indeed surprised the submarine's captain as she abruptly turned towards the U-20's line of sight.[7] Furthermore, the ship's markings had been painted over and she flew no flag. The *Lusitania* was identified only as a large, four-

[6] *A Formal Inquiry Ordered by the Board of Trade into the Loss of the Steamship Lusitania, (1915)* 2d, sess 97. accessed August 20, 2013, http://www.titanicinquiry.org/Lusitania/02Header.php

[7] Thomas Bailey and Herman Bauer and Walther Schwieger, "German Documents Relating to the Lusitania", 335.

stack, two-mast passenger steamer before being fired upon.[8] The torpedo struck at roughly mid-ship between boiler rooms 1 and 2. A second explosion observed by the crew of the U-20 was of unknown origin and remains so to this day. The ship's identity was revealed to the crew of the U-boat only shortly after the first explosion. The ship then sank in less than twenty minutes.

Abandon Ship

Research into the proceedings once the determination was made to abandon ship is less developed than most elements of *The Lusitania's* sinking. The fact of the matter is that the lifeboats represented the only means to leave the ship safely and most were left intact as the ship sank. Panicked passengers overloaded several boats. Many lifeboats that were deployed never reached the water with passengers aboard.[9] The ship listed at such an angle that several boats were torn apart against the rivets protruding from the *Lusitania*'s hull.[10]

Whereas previous research placed little emphasis on the performance of the crew within the context of the disaster, this research contributes a fresh lens onto the failure to deploy lifeboats safely and effectively. It answers the question as to whether that failure was a function of circumstance, incompetence, or cowardice.

Rescue & Recovery

[8] Ibid.

[9] Diana Preston, *Lusitania: An Epic Tragedy* (New York: Walker Publishing Company, 2002), 218-220.

[10] Diana Preston, *Lusitania*, 222.

Research into the rescue and recovery operations relies heavily on first person accounts. A lack of lifejackets and the temperature of the water doomed those not fortunate enough to have secured a place on a lifeboat. The British Navy's assets were docked at Queenstown over two hours away, when *Lusitania's* distress calls began coming in. Private fishing boats were among the first to arrive on the scene. Most of the victims were never recovered. This indicated that many were either trapped on the ship or unable to swim far enough away from it to avoid being dragged down in the undercurrent of the *Lusitania* as she sank to the bottom off the south Irish Sea. The crew was unable to keep *Lusitania* afloat long enough for many of those in the water to escape.

American Reaction

For many Americans, the *Lusitania* tragedy had the effect of putting a suddenly intimate lens on a very distant war. The research conducted follows the story development of the *New York Times* before and after the disaster. Comparing and contrasting the continuity of coverage of the largest newspaper in the country at the time can reasonably serve as a proxy for public sentiment.

It would be almost two years after the *Lusitania* disaster before the United States entered the war. Despite the loss of 128 out of 171 American passengers, the Lusitania did not elicit an immediate nor direct move toward war. It did however, change the trajectory of American sentiment.

The sinking of the *Titanic* three years before had educated the public and *Lusitania's* designers to believe that a virtually unsinkable ship could be built. The safety provisions such as lifeboat capacity –entirely a response to *Titanic's* shortcomings – were

well beyond the occupancy of the ship. Weather was calm and the submarine threat known rather precisely.

Yet somehow the fastest passenger ship in the world was tracked down and sunk by a single German U-boat while the ship was under the careful and confident control of the British Admiralty. The loss of life was staggering – nearly two thirds of the passengers and crew on board. Public sentiment immediately following the disaster was focused on reconciling *Lusitania's* reputation with its demise. The German brutality on the other hand, surrendered to the back pages of early editions and then disappeared entirely. What *Lusitania* did do, is educate Americans as to the collateral implications of Europe's war and the grave limitations of neutrality.

CHAPTER I I

KNOWLEDGE OF THE THREAT

In the late morning hours of May 1, 1915, the *Lusitania*, a British luxury ocean liner of some 785 feet in length and tipping the scales at over 30,000 (30,396) tons, began taking on passengers, cargo, and the necessary provisions of a ship of her caliber headed out on the uncertain North Atlantic. Knowledge of an imminent threat of attack to any naval or merchant ship traveling near England's coast was widespread. Germany's imperial command issued a warning to merchant vessels traveling in the English channel in February of 1915.

> "All the waters surrounding Great Britain and Ireland, including the whole of the English Channel, are hereby declared to be a war zone. From February 18 onwards every enemy merchant vessel found within this war zone will be destroyed without it always being possible to avoid danger to the crews and passengers. Neutral ships will also be exposed to danger in the war zone, as in view of the misuse of neutral flags ordered on January 31 by the British government, and owing to the unforeseen incidents to which naval warfare is liable, it is impossible to avoid attacks being made on neutral ships in mistake for those of the enemy."
>
> Germany Imperial Command
> February 4, 1915

Germany had deployed its submarine fleet to patrol the waters around Great Britain and Ireland to blockade shipments of supplies to England and its allies. In theory, blockading Britain was sound war strategy as it was a highly industrialized island-nation dependent on its colonies and other trading partners for the resources necessary to power its economy and war machine. Britain therefore had a large merchant fleet that reflected this maritime dependency. To protect and extend its colonies and trade routes, Britain had amassed the largest and most powerful navy in the world.

Germany's blockade would prove increasingly effective as the war went on. Its effectiveness corresponded to the build-up of its submarine fleet and Britain's increased need for imported war materials. It was so effective in fact, that England's First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill announced a program to outfit large merchant ships – including first class British liners – with 4.7 inch caliber guns at the bow and stern. By March 17, 1914, the British House of Commons understood that forty merchant ships had been so armed. In his report to the House of Commons, Churchill projected that by the end of the following fiscal year (March 31, 1915) the armament program would have outfitted some seventy ships. In addition to the armaments, all armed merchant cruisers would be commissioned by the Admiralty as ships of the Royal Navy. As such, this declaration meant that these ships – which could include the *Lusitania* – would consequently be indistinguishable in status and control from men of war.[11]

[11] Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster*, 12.

Although the armaments were claimed to be defensive in nature, their effect was to change the rules of naval engagement and ultimately widen the conflict to include previously neutral countries such as the United States. Submarine technology (as a weapons system) at the outbreak of World War I was new and relatively primitive. A large, armed merchant cruiser had the speed and agility and now in some cases (ships outfitted with guns) the firepower to cripple or destroy a surfaced submarine.[12] What is clear from the record is that the British Admiralty's program to arm merchant ships and commercial liners was intended to disrupt the effectiveness of Germany's *submarine* warfare. The specific orders given to all merchant vessels and liners at the outbreak of war were to *not* resist armed enemy warships. Churchill's program to arm merchant vessels revised the instructions given to British merchantmen to *engage* the lightly armed German submarines using all methods of resistance including ramming the submarine at full speed, if the opportunity presented itself.

The narrow scope of Churchill's armament program (targeting submarines and warships such as merchant raiders), the urgency and speed of its deployment, and the public nature of its disclosure all seem to underscore the knowledge of an imminent threat of submarine attack was pervasive within Britain's war apparatus. That knowledge was now being projected into the public sector. Therefore it seems all but certain that the Cunard cruise line and the captain of the *Lusitania* must have been well aware of the threat before she set sail from New York. What they may not have anticipated was the German response to Churchill's program.

[12] Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster*, 13.

Germany's response to the Admiralty's disclosure of an armament program for merchant ships further escalated the threat level at the time of *Lusitania's* departure. Although the British government purposely did not disclose whether or not *Lusitania* had yet been fitted with the armaments specified by the Admiralty (it hadn't), Germany had little choice but to assume it had. In fact, the German Embassy in New York went to the extraordinary length to warn the public that it considered any ship sailing St. Georges channel a target for destruction.[13] Germany also unilaterally changed the rules of naval engagement regarding submarines. Merchant vessels would no longer receive a warning nor time to affect an effort to abandon ship. This new rule would be this change that would in the end, have a profound impact on the fate of the *Lusitania*.

On the morning of May 1, 1915, passengers began arriving on New York City's Pier 54 along with their belongings and baggage to be loaded onto the *Lusitania* for its return voyage to Liverpool. Rumors had been circulating among the public for many weeks that the *Lusitania* would be sunk on one of its crossings of the Atlantic. Both she and her converted-troopship sister the *Mauretania* were rumored to have been marked for destruction by the German government. The underlying logic behind the rumor was intuitive. Both ships were built for speed and the ability to transport large numbers of people across vast ocean distances. The enormous casualties being experienced (by both sides) meant the Allies' appetite for new troops and weaponry would seem insatiable. *Lusitania* and *Mauretania* were believed to be unique tactical assets in a long ground

[13] Julian Corbett, *Official History of the War: Naval Operations*. *Vol. II* (UckField, East Sussex: Naval and Military Press Ltd, 2009), 260.

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war. Steps taken by the German Consulate in New York City hadn't helped dispel the rumor, as it had issued a warning in the "New York Times" and several prominent newspapers that read as follows:

> *Travelers intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany and her allies and Great Britain and her allies; that the zone of war includes the waters adjacent to the British Isles; that, in accordance with formal notice given by the Imperial German Government, vessels flying the flag of Great Britain or any of her allies, are liable to destruction in those waters and that travelers sailing in the war zone on ships of Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk.*
>
> German Consulate New York City, *New York Times*, May 1, 1915

Along with the published warnings in American newspapers, Germany's submarine fleet was actively engaging ships in the waters off the southern shore of Ireland – *Lusitania's* planned route to Liverpool, England. In the two days preceding *Lusitania's* departure from her American port of call, German submarines sank the *Earl of Lathom*, the *Candidate*, and the *Centurion*. Each of these ships had been navigated on *Lusitania's* sail-path toward St Georges channel.

Therefore, in the case of the *Lusitania*, contributing to the threat was the fact that Germany had already created a highly effective kill-zone through which *Lusitania* would have to pass on its voyage from New York to Liverpool. Germany may have suspected that *Lusitania* was armed with guns capable of sinking her submarines – a weapons class

she had fully deployed and had only a limited number of (18) at the time. In fact, at the outbreak of the war, Germany had the smallest submarine fleet among all combatants.

Ironically, England's alleged armament program may have had the opposite of its intended effect. The program may have further incentivized - rather than detoured - Germany's motivation to attack merchant ships and liners. The German calculus would have been that any reduction in force of the submarine fleet would translate to an increase in force for the British and her allies, since submarines had shown to be a particularly effective means of enforcing the blockade of English supplies. As it would later prove out, the Germans' fears of the potency of armed commercial vessels against her submarines was quite correct. *See Exhibit I.*

Exhibit I

British Merchant Ships	Armed Merchant Ships	Unarmed Merchant Ships
Number vessels attacked	310	302
Sunk by torpedoes without warning	62	30
Sunk by gunfire or bombs	12	205
Escaped	236	67
Pct. Escaped	76%	22%

Published by British Admiralty
Activity from January 1, 1916 to January 25, 1917

Churchill's very public announcement in the English Parliament of the armament program may have actually *increased* the threat of attack on the *Lusitania* (and all merchant ships). Whether or not it increased the threat, the program undoubtedly raised the casualty rate per engagement by altering the conduct of submarine warfare. The cases of two liners - the *Falaba* and the *Lusitania* - illustrate this critical transition by the Germans and it quickly diffused across all navies involved in the war.

Nine months after fighting had erupted in August 1914, the death toll on the battlefields of Europe stood in the millions. There would be many more casualties to follow over the next three years. At the time the Cunard-owned *Lusitania* pulled away from her moorings in New York for the last time, a punishing stalemate had descended across Europe. These ground conditions heightened the importance of securing supply lines that could withstand a prolonged conflict. Both the Allied and Axis powers realized that a disruption in supplies could therefore tip battlefield conditions. The British and German navies were responsible for affecting such a disruption. It is therefore not surprising that the inexhaustible bloodshed was not limited to the battlefields. Multiple naval clashes had already taken place involving expensive new weapon systems for the time. The chosen weapons of this new scope of war would in effect herald the beginning of unheard losses among not just military personal but civilian passengers at sea as well.

In November of 1914, Great Britain mined and blockaded the North Sea. This in turn effectively blocked German ports from receiving foreign assistance and trade. In response, the German Admiralty declared that the British Isles were to be a designated war zone as of February 4, 1915. Germany elaborated that if any ship belonging to Great

Britain or her allies were found by German maritime or military craft within the declared war zone it would be destroyed by the most fearsome naval weapon conceived up to that time - the submarine.[14]

A German submarine was the most likely threat to attack a British built and owned ship such as the *Lusitania* in May of 1915. Several smaller British passenger ships had been attacked and sent to the bottom in previous months. One such vessel was the *S.S. Falaba*, a cargo-passenger ship of some 5,000 tons which sank on March 28, 1915. It sank in only eight minutes after a single torpedo fired from the German submarine U-28 struck its engine room.[15]

Although there are many similarities between the two ships, one important difference between the *Falaba* sinking and that of the *Lusitania* a little over a month later, was that the Commander of the U-28 (Baron Forstner) allowed time for the passengers of the *Falaba* to climb into and launch the lifeboats of the doomed ship after being warned by a surfaced U-28. However, as passengers loaded into lifeboats, the officers onboard began sending up rescue flares and broke the German-imposed radio silence by sending wireless messages to surrounding ships. The U-28 captain viewed this as a breach of his agreement to spare *Falaba's* crew and passengers and therefore cut short the doomed ship's time to abandon ship. Although the time between the *Falaba* being warned and the firing of the torpedo vary widely between British and German accounts (7 minutes, and 23 minutes respectively), it seems neither was adequate to

[14] Diana Preston, *Lusitania*, 68.

[15] Ibid., 75.

prevent 104 lives (of 242 onboard) from being lost in the resulting panic as the ship quickly submerged.[16]

A month later in the conflict, German submarine commanders would abandon the customary and humanitarian practice of warning ships before they were sunk because of the increased probability that the warned vessels would either be secretly armed with hidden deck guns or that they would charge at full speed towards the U-boat with the intention to ram it. This change in the rules of engagement would be exemplified in the case of the *R.M.S. Lusitania*. The speedy British liner was sunk after a single torpedo was fired from the U-20 which avoided warning the unsuspecting liner of the need to load and launch the lifeboats.[17]

The humanitarian value of the warning of impending attack previously afforded British merchant ships by German submarines is intuitive. The 100 casualties resulting from the sinking of the *Falaba* represented 42% of its passengers and crew. Whereas the 1,198 lives lost from the *Lusitania* disaster reflected nearly two thirds of the men, women, and children on board. Both ships had approximately the same amount of time (15 - 20 minutes) from the moment of realization that the vessel would be/was torpedoed to its sinking below the waves. Of course other factors would have influenced the relative loss of life such as the availability of rescue ships, weather conditions, and the conduct of the abandoned ship proceedings. Its worth noting that the *Falaba* was able to

[16] Ibid.

[17] Thomas Bailey and Herman Bauer and Walther Schwieger, "German Documents Relating to the Lusitania", 335.

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release 3 of 4 of its lifeboats whereas *Lusitania* only 6 of 22. Certainly the warning issued by the German submarine to the *Falaba* explains *some* of the difference between the casualty rates. The *Falaba* incident proved to be a turning point in the conduct of submarine warfare and indeed in World War I itself.

It should be noted however that with both ships having approximately the same brief time to abandon ship, *Falaba* saved 138 lives while *Lusitania's* crew was able to save 761. *Lusitania's* ability to launch twice the number of lifeboats and save nearly six times the number of passengers and crew is testimony to her crew, particularly under the circumstances of a surprise attack.

The *Lusitania* was traveling at 18 knots when the torpedo hit while the *Falaba* was at full stop having heeded the warning issued by the surfaced submarine. It would take several precious minutes before *Lusitania* could be slowed enough to safely launch her lifeboats. Additionally, *Lusitania's* response was hampered by an immediate and severe heel to its starboard side and simultaneous submersion of the bow.[18] This rendered most if not all of her port side lifeboats useless. The bow's submersion also meant that starboard side lifeboats had immense difficulty loading and then lowering safely (stem and stern even with the waterline). Many fully-loaded lifeboats on the starboard side foundered immediately and sent passengers into the sea. The *Fabala* in contrast, loaded and lowered her lifeboats under nearly ideal conditions with its crew's full attention toward abandoning the ship simply because it had been given clear and ample warning from its attacker.

[18] Ibid.

While the captain and crew of the *Lusitania* knew well the general threat of a submarine attack along the route they were to travel, they were not given warning of imminent attack from U-20 Captain Schwieger that had been customary and may have saved countless lives. That custom had been ceased unilaterally by the Germans in part because of the British Admiralty's announcement of the broad merchant ship armament program that appeared to target specifically the vulnerabilities of German submarines. The suspension was also influenced by the fact that several submarines had been damaged, sunk, or outrun by evasive maneuvers by merchant ships that took advantage of the restricted attack policies initially followed by German submarine officers. By the Spring of 1915, the gloves were coming off of the newest naval weapons system. This development would have grave implications to merchant and military ships in the northern Atlantic for the remainder of the war as well as wars to follow.

CHAPTER III

PRE-VOYAGE PRECAUTIONS

The sudden advent of submarine warfare made what was once a relaxing trip to lands afar, now a somewhat dangerous affair. Willing passengers would be traveling at their own risk and exposing themselves, their loved ones, and their property to the possibility of destruction. The threat of a submarine attack may well have been in the back of many of the passenger's minds as they handed their ticket to the purser and boarded the ramp into the *Lusitania's* interior that morning. This anxiety was likely exacerbated by the advertising agency that the German Consulate had hired to create and issue an explicit warning to the American traveling public. Instead of showing up in the newspapers a full two weeks ahead of the *Lusitania's* departure as was originally planned, the warning was measurably delayed and issued on the morning of the ship's departure. At that point, passengers had little time to secure let alone read a newspaper. Those that had seen the warning relied on the ship's crew for interpretation and reassurance since there was little time to find alternative passage.

One couple - Mr. and Mrs. Grab - didn't see the warning until after they had boarded the ship, but were reassured by the words of Chief Purser James McCubbin.

McCubbin stated that the ship was too fast to be caught.[19] Another couple, Theodore and Belle Naish had read the warning only after the ship had pulled out of the harbor, but had decided to ignore it. Mr. Naish convinced himself and Mrs. Naish that if the warning had been official and had been sent through the proper channels "each American passenger would have had warning sent and delivered before boarding the vessel."[20]

Several passengers joked about the possibility of the *Lusitania* being sunk with them on it. One of those amused passengers was Elbert Hubbard. The famous writer even welcomed the possibility of perishing in an attack as he explained to a reporter that he believed that such a death would capitalize on his literary works and "launch him into the Hall of Fame".[21] Some passengers seemed to have received extraordinary means by which they were encouraged not sail on the *Lusitania*. This notion is best illustrated by the experience of one very prominent passenger, Alfred G. Vanderbilt. Vanderbilt had inherited the vast fortune of his family's railroad empire and was easily one of the wealthiest passengers on board the luxury liner. Vanderbilt had received an anonymous telegram while unpacking on the ship in his suite. The message had read "THE LUSITANIA IS DOOMED. DO NOT SAIL ON HER" it was signed "MORTE," Vanderbilt shrugged the message off that it was "somebody trying to have a little fun at my expense."[22]

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[19] Diana Preston, *Lusitania*, 101.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 98.

[22] Ibid., 100.

A Boston bookseller named Charles Lauriat decided to continue with the boarding procedure despite reading the warning issued in the newspapers and feeling uneasy about the departure. Earlier when he had purchased his ticket from Cunard's Boston office, Lauriat had asked the official in charge whether the *Lusitania* would receive an armed escort on its arrival into the designated war zone and in response was told: "Oh yes! Every precaution will be taken."[23]

For the most part, those traveling on the *Lusitania* seemed to downplay the German Consulate's warning. Eyewitnesses say they were encouraged to do so by the ship's captain and crew. A handful of people did cancel passage. However, this was not an unusual number of cancelations for such a trip. Regardless of public perceptions, the Admiralty under which whose authority the *Lusitania* now sailed, understood fully the elevated nature of the threat in May of 1915. In the three months prior, forty eight British merchant ships had been sunk by German submarines as Table II indicates.

Table II

Month, 1915	British Ships Sunk by German Blockade
Feb, 1915	14
Mar, 1915	23
Apr, 1915	11
Total	48

[23] Ibid., 101.

Design, Engineering, and Outfitting

As a modern cruise liner of the time, *Lusitania* benefited from lessons learned out of the *Titanic* disaster in 1912 and the *Empress of Ireland* in 1914. The *Titanic* had inspired new regulations that required every British passenger liner to have enough life boats to accommodate all on board, including the crew. This was not the case with *Titanic* which carried only twenty lifeboats for more than twenty two hundred passengers.[24] One of the most important pre-voyage precautions met by *Lusitania* was its lifeboat count: a capacity that exceeded the actual passenger and crew count by over six hundred people.[25] This meant that up to one third of the lifeboats could be inoperative or otherwise compromised and all of the passengers and crew could still be safely accommodated. In *Lusitania's* case, even this safety margin proved insufficient as only a fraction of her seventy boats were safely boarded and launched. Its important to note that although *Lusitania* indeed benefited from earlier disasters such as *Titanic*, there were limits to those benefits because *Lusitania* was structurally an older design. Therefore the changes had to be retrofitted and their effectiveness was somewhat compromised in comparison to new ships.

Another noteworthy precaution was the *Lusitania's* engineering. The ship had been constructed by the Scottish shipbuilding firm John Brown and Company Ltd. from

[24] Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster*, 168.

[25] Ibid., 169.

August of 1904 to September of 1907. From the Brown shipyard located at Clydebank, Scotland and on the River Mersey slightly downstream from the port city of Liverpool, the *Lusitania* took shape. The company built a ship with several features considered revolutionary for the time and all of which afforded their existence to the *Lusitania* being partly owned by the British government.

The *Lusitania's* primary owner - the Cunard Line - had entered into a contract with the British government in July of 1903. The agreement stipulated that the British would pay 2.6 million pounds for the construction of two massive transatlantic ships in the form of a 20 year loan.[26] A sum of one-hundred and fifty thousand pounds a year would be paid to Cunard for the upkeep and maintenance of the ships. This contract was not without safeguards, for Cunard was required to remain an English-owned company, the two ships (*Lusitania* and sister ship *Mauretania*) would be required to carry mail and passengers across the Atlantic, and the British Admiralty was to have complete final approval of the ship's designs before construction was to commence.[27]

The British Admiralty was adamant when it came to the right of building the ships to a government specification since the possibility existed that - in the time of war - the operation of either or both could be handed over to the British Navy upon their request to be used as merchant cruisers or troopships in the defense of the British Empire. The anticipation of this possible future for the ships most certainly influenced aspects of their

[26] Kent Layton, *Lusitania: An Illustrated Biography* (Chalford: Amberley Publishing, 2010), 16.

[27] Ibid.

design. Ultimately, the construction would have to be consistent with ships that could be effectively and quickly converted to ones operated by naval personnel as ships of war. These design precautions would in turn have serious consequences for the *Lusitania* some eight years after her launch.

In accordance with Admiralty specifications, *Lusitania* had been constructed with a double hull and eleven traverse watertight bulkheads. This double hull design had the effect of protecting the ship from a breach to the outer plating. The bulkheads served to divide *Lusitania* into twelve compartments below the lower deck that would give the crew tactical options in the event that of a breach of the second hull. Similar to the design used in the *Titanic*, these compartments could be used to control flooding and listing. The bulkheads also provided a method to isolate damage and possibly make temporary repairs while at sea.

In addition to the double-hull construction and eleven bulkheads, there were two longitudinal bulkheads; one on each side of the vessel and extending nearly half the length of the ship. These watertight spaces served as the massive coal bunkers necessary for high-speed transatlantic travel when *Lusitania's* appetite for fuel reached one thousand tons of coal each day. When full (as they were at the beginning of a voyage), they also provided protection for the boilers and engines from gunfire that penetrated the outer hull plating. Unfortunately, they provided no protection in the event of a torpedo attack. As *Lusitania* neared the end of its voyage from New York to Liverpool, these cavernous bunkers were essentially empty. As a result, a design precaution intended to protect the ship (including supplementing its speed with transatlantic range), instead

promptly flooded and actually contributed to the dramatic list that inhibited lifeboat deployment and contributed also to the ships rapid submersion. Thus a design consideration that never anticipated a below-water torpedo strike, contributed to the accelerated time to sinking of *Lusitania* and its elevated loss of life.

Captain Turner testified under oath that he had ordered all sixty-one bulkhead doors closed as a precaution on the morning of the disaster. Later, during the Mersey Inquiry, Turner acknowledged that he never received confirmation that his order had been executed, but believed it to be the case. This precaution appears to have been moot. The secondary explosion observed by the U-20 crew and *Lusitania* survivors which most likely was one of Lusitania's four massive boilers, would have enlarged the hole created by the torpedo and rendered many of the compartments nonviable, regardless of the position of the bulkhead doors.

Another precaution coming out of the *Titanic* disaster was the requirement that all British passenger ships carry a Staff Captain on board. The Staff Captain was in charge of ships internal administration and could be called upon to assume Captain's duties in the event that the captain is incapacitated, missing, or lost at sea. While *Lusitania* left New York with Captain Turner and Staff Captain Anderson on board, only Captain Turner survived. Turner was in command of his ship until he was swept overboard as the ship submerged. Anderson's body was never recovered.

A pre-voyage precaution that was *not* taken was the (post-construction) installation of 4.7 inch guns as was the recommendation of the British Admiralty in a program begun months prior to *Lusitania's* departure from New York. Given *Lusitania's*

speed and enhanced design, her vulnerability may have been judged as less than that of other ships outfitted as a priority in early phases of the program. Importantly, the *Lusitania* was not in full use by the British Admiralty when she sailed for Liverpool in May of 1915. She would only have been permitted to carry guns if she was a warship under Admiralty command. Importantly, had the *Lusitania* carried guns, she would have forfeited her rights as a civilian vessel to not be attacked without warning.

Post-Launch Precautions:
Patrols, escorts, & Decoded Enemy Intercepts

On the morning of April 25, 1915, six days before the *Lusitania* left New York, the German High Seas Fleet Command ordered three of its North Sea U-boats out on an intercept and attack mission in southern British waters. German Commander Hermann Bauer of the 3rd Submarine Flotilla ordered U-30 to the Dartmouth area, U-20 and U-27 to the Irish Sea and Bristol Channel.[28] According to Commander Bauer's diary, the U-boat orders were explicit: attack enemy troopships steaming out of major British ports in the English and Irish Channels such as Liverpool and Dover.

British intelligence (Room 40) intercepted and decoded the orders. In addition, U-20 tested her radio on April 30 and this too was intercepted. At that point, the Admiralty knew with a good deal of certainty which boats were patrolling, where they were dispatched to, and the tactical reputations of their respective commanders. The

[28] Thomas Bailey and Herman Bauer and Walther Schwieger, "German Documents Relating to the Lusitania", 334.

intercepted information was interpreted and forwarded to the Grand Fleet and the major south coastal stations by May 4.

Although the Grand Fleet was aware of a clear and present danger to the *Lusitania*, it did not provide an escort to the passenger liner or any other non-military vessel in the area. Both the *Centurion* and the *Candidate* were unescorted through the waters south of the Coningbeg Lightship on May 6th; both were sunk by the U-20. As the *Lusitania* approached the southern coast of Ireland and the German-declared warzone, it did so in dense fog. The weather played an integral part in putting the *Lusitania* and the U-20 on a deadly course toward one another.

Because of the limitations of navigational technology, thick coastal fog was cause for caution in maritime operations of the time. The liner, *Empress of Ireland* was sunk in May of 1914 after a collision with a Norwegian ship confounded by a thick fog on the St. Lawrence River in North America. Over one thousand people lost their lives in the disaster. On the approach to Ireland's southern coast, *Lusitania's* officers had decidedly slowed the ship and ultimately altered its course. They did so to be within visual contact of certain coastal navigation markers once the fog cleared.

Once free of the fog, Captain Turner slowed the ship further and straightened its course so that the bridge could recalibrate its navigation system and make final adjustments to steam towards its destination of Liverpool. This was a precaution taken on Turner's orders and due entirely to his calculation that the risk of skewed navigational coordinates outweighed the risk of attack. This miscalculation may have been unduly influenced by the disaster involving the *Empress of Ireland* just one year earlier.

Regardless of its motivation, it proved to be a post-launch precaution taken on account of one risk, that catastrophically put *Lusitania* in harms way for another. The maneuvers Turner undertook put the liner on a slow, straight course in an area German submarines were known to frequent (The Headlands) and that the Admiralty had given clear instructions for all ships to avoid.

The major coastal naval stations including Queenstown, Liverpool, and Milford Haven were informed of the German patrols days after the Grand Fleet Command and were not well prepared to provide *Lusitania* the precautions justified by the situation. Nor were they equipped to counter the threat. That being said, the British certainly could have assigned more ships to patrol along *Lusitania's* track without directly escorting the liner.[29] However, in order for other ships to be assigned to the Queenstown area, they had to be taken from other operating areas in the war, such as the entrance to the Baltic Sea. At that time, the Royal Navy wanted their best ships concentrated in high risk areas, of which there were many. Queenstown was not strategic, nor was it considered to be an area that was particularly vulnerable to German control.

The Royal Navy Commander at Queenstown, Rear Admiral Sir Charles Coke had only a rag-tag fleet of small craft and armed trawlers with which to patrol a large expanse of the contested Irish Sea. The Queenstown patrol was known fondly as the "Gilbert & Sullivan Navy" and had not a single boat capable of keeping pace with the *Lusitania*.[30] Nor were any equipped with depth charges as the weapon was not fully deployed until

[29] Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster*, 41.

[30] Ibid., 145.

1917. With fifteen small, slow sea craft patrolling one hundred and eighty miles of coastline, Admiral Coke understood the grave insufficiency Queenstown posed to *Lusitania*.

The only substantial warship available to Coke at Queenstown was the *HMS Juno*. The cruiser was nearly obsolete (commissioned in 1897) and vulnerable to submarine attack herself. Nonetheless, as the most powerful operating ship available, the *Juno* was reported to have been patrolling the area of the U-20 near the time of attack.[31] In his war diary, Captain Schwieger noted that approximately 90 minutes prior to firing on the *Lusitania*, the U-20 heard the *Juno* passing by on the surface.[32] Twenty-five minutes later during an attempt to attack the *Juno*, Schweiger spotted her zigzagging under full speed heading to Queenstown (to complete its patrol).[33] British war records confirm *Juno's* noontime position as approximately that of the U-20's. Unknown to the command of the *Juno* at that time, Schwieger gave underwater chase. Although the Juno was much slower than the *Lusitania*, her speed and zigzag course out-maneuvered the U-20 and she returned safely to port.[34]

However insufficient, the Queenstown patrols were a post-launch precaution the Royal Navy provided at this point in the war. German submarine commanders loathed the armed trawlers since it was necessary for a submarine to surface in order to launch at

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[31] Ibid., 174.

[32] Thomas Bailey and Herman Bauer and Walther Schwieger, "German Documents Relating to the Lusitania", 334.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster*, 147.

torpedo. While on the surface, a submarine was slower and far less maneuverable than a trawler. In addition, trawlers were not considered a high-value target by either navy. German submarines carried no more than six torpedoes and these were intended for more consequential targets. The irony of that day is that had *Juno* drawn the attack from the U-20, Schwieger would have used his last available torpedo on a far lower-value target than the *Lusitania*. The U-20 had fired three one day earlier with two striking their targets. U-boat captains were required to maintain at least two torpedoes for protection on the return trip to homeport for refueling and rearming. Therefore the torpedo that devastated the *Lusitania*, could quite possibly have not been available to Schwieger, had it been expended on the *Juno* patrolling the channel only an hour earlier.

Equally ironic, patrols intended to protect the *Lusitania* that day inadvertently contributed to her destruction. The U-20 gave chase to the unsuspecting *Juno* for a period of time as she steamed toward Queenstown. In fact, this (unsuccessful) chase put the U-20 on an intercept course with the *Lusitania*. At 12:45pm and shortly after giving up the on the *Juno*, Schwieger surfaced to find "unusually good visibility, very beautiful weather."[35] After 30 minutes on the surface, Schwieger detected at a distance of thirteen miles, "four funnels and two masts of a large passenger steamer"[36] The U-20 submerged immediately and proceeded at full speed (about 9 knots underwater) toward its prey and on a straight course towards Queenstown. Schwieger did not believe he would be in a position to attack the passenger liner if it stayed on its course. Incredibly, the *Lusitania*

[35] Ibid., 148.

[36] Thomas Bailey and Herman Bauer and Walther Schwieger, "German Documents Relating to the Lusitania", 335.

suddenly changed course and began a heading away from Queenstown toward the U-20's position.[37] Unknown to Schwieger, Captain Turner decided to use the break in the weather conditions to recalibrate Lusitania's navigation ordinates prior to steaming into the last leg of its voyage to Liverpool. It was an entirely ordinary, but fateful decision for Captain Turner.

A Declared Target Without Escort

While it is clear that *Lusitania* was a declared target and steaming into an area of known enemy submarine activity, the Admiralty's rationale not to provide escort or *increased* patrols is not so clear. Some historians believe *Juno* was initially assigned to escort the *Lusitania*, but was reassigned two days before the attack. According to author Colin Simpson, after noon on May the 5th , the Admiralty ordered the *Juno* to abandon its escort mission and to return to port.[38] The Admiralty War Diary indicates that it suggested that destroyers from Milford Haven take up the escort of the *Lusitania* although the Haven was farther away from the liner's location than Queenstown and its turn-of-the-century cruiser. Regardless of the Admiralty's suggestion, the Milford Haven destroyers were never ordered to sea. Nor is there any record that the *Lusitania* was notified of the provision of escort or its ordered retreat. Captain Turner testified at the coroner's inquest immediately following the sinking that he knew of no plans for an escort of the *Lusitania* at any point in her voyage. Contrary to Simpson's report, it seems

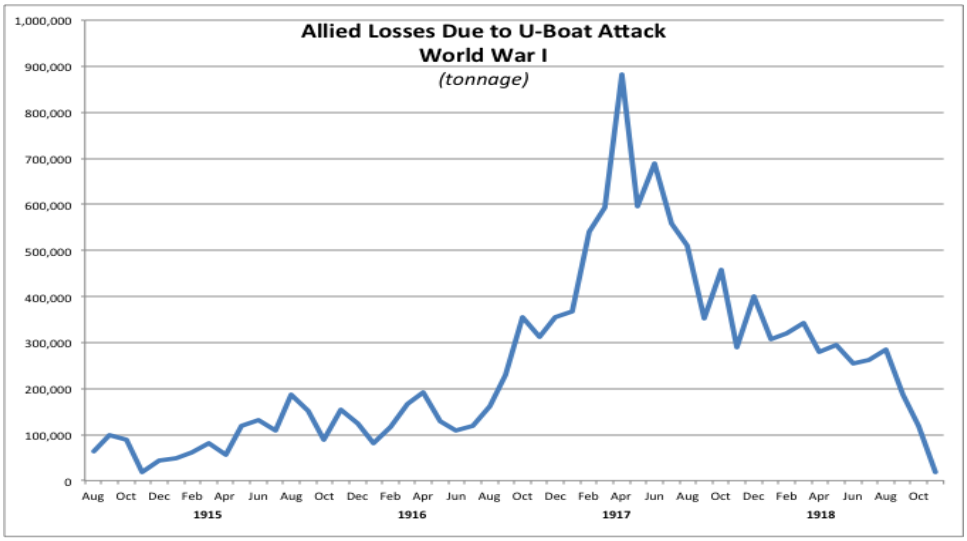
[37] Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster*, 148.

[38] Colin Simpson, *The Lusitania*, (New York: Little, Brown Publishing, 1972), 127.

unlikely that the *Juno* was ever seriously considered as an effective escort for the *Lusitania*.

The *Lusitania's* lack of escort should be considered a major tactical error and one with significant consequences. Perhaps more than any other precaution taken, escorts were effective deterrents against a single U-boat attack, as Allied experience early in the war shows.

Exhibit III



Because of their effectiveness, demand for escorts was understandably high. Britain's naval war strategy of blockading German sources of food and other resources had the effect of spreading the Allies' normally abundant naval assets very thin. Compounding matters was the state of the ground war and its voracious appetite for fresh troops. Troop ships from Canada and elsewhere therefore, were given priority over other shipping. Finally, the British had deployed a new class of battleship prior to the war called the Dreadnought. These enormous ships required significant complimentary assets

to be effectively deployed in a sea battle. This meant that much of the British destroyer fleet was otherwise committed to protecting the Navy's newest and by far, most-expensive strategic weapon. Its destroyer fleet was at the same time effecting Britain's blockade of Germany and escorting troop ships servicing the ground war. The Admiralty's decision-making apparatus was no doubt operating under the conditions of a severely overextended destroyer force. It can be speculated that this may have influenced the decision not to supply *Lusitania* with escort(s) from Milford Haven. It is also likely that the fact that the destroyers were some five hours away from *Lusitania* on May 7th diminished the considerations of ordering a Milford Haven escort to sea.

By the Spring of 1915, even escorts of the highest priority (troop convoys) were being cancelled due to the lack of destroyers. On March 29th for example, the Admiralty informed Canadian authorities all escorts of Canadian troop ships would cease after May 7th.[39] Some military historians have suggested in retrospect, that perhaps the Admiralty should have recognized the grave threat posed to the *Lusitania* and if unable to provide destroyer escort, certainly could have increased patrol along *Lusitania's* known course. However, its seems logical that the overextension of naval resources conceivably cascaded across the entire Northern Atlantic theater and no doubt implicated patrol coverage as well. The terrible irony is that the *Juno* was returning to port from routine patrol when it unknowingly crossed paths with the U-20 less than two hours before the submarine closed on the *Lusitania* for the kill. Clearly, patrols were not as effective as escorts for mitigating the threat of attack.

[39] P. Beesley, In *Room 40*, (London: Hamish Hamilton Publishing, 1982), 107.

Nonetheless, Cunard itself could have applied for escort at any point of *Lusitania's* voyage. Cunard officials were aware of the rising threat levels and in fact convened an urgent meeting with Rear Admiral Stileman in Liverpool on the morning of the attack. In fact, the Cunard Company itself later acknowledged that it had made no application for an escort ship.[40] The ship itself could have made the application for escort through Captain Turner. He did not. The following exchange is from the Coroner's Inquiry:

> *Juror:* In the face of the warnings you had had, that the vessel would be torpedoed before she reached her destination, did you make any application to the Admiralty for escort?
>
> *Turner:* No, we left that to them.
>
> *Juror:* Are you aware whether your owners made any application?
>
> *Turner:* I know nothing whatsoever about it. I simply received my orders to go and I went. And I would do so again.
>
> *Juror:* Do you think it would have been advisable for patrol boats to have accompanied you?
>
> *Turner:* It might have helped, but it might not have done so.
>
> *Coroner:* I suppose it might not have prevented it [the torpedoing] in the slightest degree?
>
> *Turner:* No. They might have torpedoed them [the escorts] as well.

Turner's testimony indicates that he was under no order or advisement to rendezvous with the *Juno* or any other ship. He also seems to cover for the Admiralty as well as his employer, Cunard without implicating himself. It is difficult, however to reconcile Turner's indifference to patrols with the German U-boat commander's concern

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[40] *Opinion of Court, United States District Court, (SD New York, 1st sess., 1918), In the Matter of the Petition of the Cunard Steamship Company, Limited, as Owners of the Steamship "Lusitania", for Limitation of its Liability., accessed August 20, 2013, http://www.rmslusitania.info/primary-docs/mayer-opinion/.*

about them. If the Admiralty believed that patrols were such ineffective deterrents, why have them at all – particularly under such depleted fleet conditions? Turner was not asked if he thought a patrol accompaniment would have affected the significant loss of life suffered by the *Lusitania*. It is conceivable that Turner would have thought an accompaniment advisable not necessarily to deter the attack, but in the recovery from its consequences.

An additional precaution available to the Admiralty and to Captain Turner was to divert the passenger liner to *Juno's* homeport in nearby Queenstown until the threat of submarine attack receded. Such an order however, would have conflicted with wartime policy to avoid the harbors and to steam past the Headlands. It is important to keep in mind that during wartime, all British ships were placed under the control of the Admiralty. Like *Juno*, *Lusitania's* movements were first at the discretion of the Admiralty and second by way of its owner through its captain. While patrols may or may not have deterred the attack, the proximity of the patrol craft to *Lusitania's* position after being torpedoed would most definitely *aided in recovery*. Likewise, if the liner had been ordered to Queenstown, it would have been taken from harm's way. There is little question that had either of these precautions been undertaken, they would have mitigated the loss of life, if not avoided the *Lusitania* disaster entirely.

Part of the Admiralty's consideration was likely that an escort provision itself was not without consequence. By coming under armed escort, *Lusitania* would sacrifice her protected status as a merchantman under international maritime law. A U-boat captain would then have (at best) a moral obligation - but no legal requirement - to warn the ship

before attacking. Ironically, an escort would therefore raise, not lower, a submarine's incentive to attack by marking a ship already difficult to identify from a distance, as a war asset worthy of protection (under severely limited escort provisions that the Germans were well aware of). By providing escort, the Admiralty may have inadvertently signaled (incorrectly) that *Lusitania* carried troops or other valuable wartime assets. The Admiralty's suggestion to deploy Milford Haven destroyers never materialized into an order to do so. This precaution considered - but ultimately ignored - may have been influenced by considerations such as a change in *Lusitania's* status that would silence a pre-attack warning normally afforded civilian vessels. Thus the Admiralty's calculus may have assumed (wrongly) that the unescorted passenger liner would have been allowed time to abandon ship before being torpedoed.

The fact pattern prior to the attack on the *Lusitania* supported such an assumption by the Admiralty. The warning in the New York papers aside, German U-boats had rarely attacked passenger liners, neutral or otherwise until May 7th. Merchant vessels attacked before that date were allowed to have crew and passengers seek the safety of lifeboats in accordance of international law. As the British blockade wore on however, German U-boats were beginning to turn to open-seas warfare, without regard to the international conventions or norms.

However, the Admiralty's decision not to order a destroyer escort may have rested on other priorities. The four destroyers in Milford Haven – *Legion*, *Lucifer*, *Linnet*, and *Laverock* – had recently finished an eight-day operation successfully escorting Irish troops and equipment to Liverpool (*Lusitania's* destination) for shipment

to the strategic Dardanelles campaign on the continent. All four destroyers put into Milford on May 6th with orders to perform maintenance, repairs, to resupply, and to immediately rendezvous with the dreadnought *Colossus* at midday on May 8th. The fact that the Admiralty declined the option to delay the movement of the *Colossus* and temporarily redeploy its Milford Haven destroyer group to escort *Lusitania* suggests the dreadnought was deemed the higher priority.

After May 7th, the Admiralty's calculus changed slightly. Two weeks after the sinking of the *Lusitania* the Royal Navy was ordered to send destroyers from Harwich to Liverpool (approx. 600 miles) to provide escort for *Lusitania's* sister liner *Mauretania*, taking troops to the Mediterranean theater.[41]

The implications of the intercepted messages from the German command to the three U-boats became apparent on May 5, 1915. On that date, the British Admiralty's high command met including First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill, First Sea Lord Adm Jack Fisher, Chief of War Staff Vice Admiral Henry Oliver, and Director of Naval Intelligence Capt Reginald Hall.[42] Also on that date, the sinking of the schooner *Earl of Lathom* by torpedo and shell fire indicated that at least one of the three U-boats was active off the south coast of Ireland.

At noon the next day, the Admiralty addressed all British ships:

> *Between South Foreland and Folkstone keep within two miles of shore and pass between the two light*

[41] Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster*, 183.

[42] Colin Simpson, *The Lusitania*, 125.

> *vessels. Take Liverpool pilot at bar. Avoid headlands; pass harbors at full speed; steer mid-channel course. Submarines off Fastnet.*
>
> British Admiralty High Command
> May 6, 1915

Lusitania received the message at 8:05 pm and acknowledged receipt. Fifteen minutes prior, it had also received a message from the nearby Queenstown naval base that simply read: "Submarines off of south coast (of Ireland)." *Lusitania* acknowledged receipt of the Queenstown message as well. Earlier in the day, the U-20 sank two ships off Coiningbeg Light: the *Candidate* at 7:40am and *Centurion* at 2:30pm. However, *Lusitania* was not made aware of the loss of these ships until late morning on the next day.

At this point, the Admiralty was running out of options as the noose tightened around *Lusitania's* neck. On the morning of May 7th – *Lusitania's* last day afloat – Alfred Booth, Chairman of Cunard Lines requested and secured an emergency meeting with the Senior Naval Officer at Liverpool (Rear Admiral Stileman). Booth was aware of the May 5th and 6th attacks along *Lusitania's* route and was now frantic with concern for his liner and its passengers. By established wartime protocol, all communication with any ship's bridge was under the exclusive authority of the British Admiralty while the ship was in war zone waters. Unauthorized to make direct contact with his own ship, Booth asked that Captain Turner be contacted immediately and be made aware of the danger posed by the U-20 including that two ships the *Candidate* and the *Centurion* had been sunk the previous day in the general vicinity of where the *Lusitania* was sailing.[43]

[43] *A Formal Inquiry into the Loss of the Steamship Lusitania,* sess 79.

Whatever precautions Booth and Stileman discussed or agreed to, none were put into effect. The U-20 intercepted its target shortly after Booth's desperate meeting concluded and inflicted a single, mortal wound that sank *Lusitania* in 18 minutes. There is no record of Cunard's Chairman requesting the Admiralty's assistance other than on the day she was sunk.[44]

Precautions Undertaken by the Captain and Crew

By May 5th and perhaps earlier, the captain and crew of the *Lusitania* appear to have been aware of the threat of submarine attack. Although they did not discuss the threat in the company of passengers unless addressing a passenger's question, they nonetheless took many (but not all) precautions they had available to them. The motivation for the actions taken were most likely the well-established protocols for all passenger ships entering the German submarine warzone declared around England and Ireland, or specific orders issued by the Admiralty. Actions taken by Captain Turner outside of normal protocol or specific orders did not appear to be evasive or reactionary in nature. The hand Turner had been dealt by the Admiralty, by Cunard, and by the German High Seas Command was extraordinary. Turner would prove to be a less than ordinary captain. The combination was disastrous.

The *Lusitania* had a strategic asset that when properly deployed, tilted the odds in a submarine attack measurably in her favor: she was fast and German submarines of

[44] Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster*, 194.

the time were relatively slow. *Lusitania* had a top speed of 24 knots displaced across 4 engines fired by 25 boilers. German U-boats mustered 15 knots under full speed on the surface under normal sea conditions. Under calm seas - such as those in the Channel the day of the attack – the U-20 on patrol was capable of up to 16-18 knots. Under conditions of attack or retreat however, the U-20 would submerge and labor under a top speed of 9 knots.

In addition to *Lusitania's* cruising speed, the liner was also advantaged in her ability to accelerate. That ability however, was not as easily deployed under attack conditions. Rather, it relied on the ability of the crew to spot a pending strike and issue an alert immediately to the bridge. By orders of the Admiralty, a ship was to turn immediately into the path of attack and accelerate toward the submarine while presenting a much narrower profile to the on-coming torpedoes and the periscope-dependent targeting mechanism.

On May 7th, additional spotters (quartermasters) had been ordered as a precaution by Captain Turner to stand watch on either side of the bridge.[45] This was normal protocol given that submarines were known to be in the vicinity and on the hunt. In addition, Turner instructed the engine room to *be prepared* "to give full speed . . . give the highest steam they could get".[46] [47] However, Captain Turner neutralized *Lusitania's* advantages by charting a course that was straight, steady and slow instead of zig-zagging and

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[45] *A Formal Inquiry into the Loss of the Steamship Lusitania,* sess 25.

[46] *Ibid.,* sess 24.

[47] *Ibid.,* sess 116.

ordering full steam, as were the standing orders from the Admiralty. Critically, the Captain did *not* order the idle boilers in Engine Room 4 to be fired up.[48] Turner would later testify to several somewhat conflicting reasons for neglecting to follow Admiralty's orders as was required by all ships entering the war zone. One of Captain Turner's reasons was to time the ship's approach to the Mersey River bar (to avoid to wait for a pilot and expose the Lusitania.) Another reason was that Turner's interpretation of the orders was different than that of the Admiralty with regards to the zig-zagging and mid-channel course instructions.

At 8am on the morning of May 7, 1915, Captain Turner reduced *Lusitania's* speed from 21 to 18 knots.[49] Fog had enveloped the ship and apparently was calculated as a greater risk to the ship's safety than a submarine attack. A half hour later, Turner ordered a further reduction in speed to 15 knots.[50] At that speed, the Captain had surrendered – at least temporarily – the *Lusitania's* critical strategic advantage. Along with further slowing the ship, Turner also ordered the ship's foghorns to be sounded every minute.[51] The concurrent timing of these two orders seems to support Turner's testimony that weather conditions dictated a course of action that conflicted with Admiralty orders. The passenger response to the frequent foghorn blasts was surprise. Some worried that it would attract attention and give enemy submarines another means of

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[48] Diana Preston, *Lusitania*, 179.

[49] *A Formal Inquiry into the Loss of the Steamship Lusitania,* sess 45.

[50] *Ibid.*

[51] *Ibid.,* sess 306.

locating the unescorted ship. Others interpreted it as a reassuring sign of the Captain's confidence on the final, short leg of the voyage.

Captain Turner and the *Lusitania's* crew took additional precautions consistent with knowledge of the submarine threat. All portholes and watertight doors were ordered closed (it was later acknowledged that execution of this order was incomplete). The only exception to this order was the Boiler Room bulkheads.[52] This exception was not common and was due in large part to the Captain's decision to leave certain boilers idle. This would require that the crew have immediate and unimpeded access across all four boiler rooms should the order come down to engage full power. As benign and unexceptional as this decision seems to be, its consequences would later prove lethal.

Turner also ordered that the lookouts be replaced every 2 hours. He then doubled their number at dawn. Although Staff Captain Anderson reported to Turner that all ports and bulkheads were closed on the Main and Lower decks, the Captain did not order a spot inspection.[53] [54] Regardless of the trust between a captain and staff captain, naval operations experts believed a spot inspection under the circumstances presenting on the morning of May 7th, would not have been unusual.

Finally, Turner ordered the lifeboats be swung out. This precaution was standard in the event that an abandon ship order was necessary. This would allow for the rapid

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[52] *Ibid.,* sess 128.

[53] Diana Preston, *Lusitania*, 179.

[54] *A Formal Inquiry into the Loss of the Steamship Lusitania,* sess 25.

loading and deployment of *Lusitania's* considerable lifeboat capacity. This was a critical precaution that the captain and crew did take.

Unfortunately, Turner and his officers largely ignored precautions normally ordered with regards to steerage, course and speed. The sum of these decisions steered the *Lusitania* into the Headlands where submarines had advantages and were known to hunt. Critically, the zigzag course that had saved the *Juno* and was considered standard procedure was abandoned in an effort by Turner to time his approach to Liverpool and avoid holding outside the harbor waiting for tides to advance. The standing order from the Admiralty for full-speed conflicted with Cunard's commercial interest in preserving fuel. A slower, straight course reduced the considerable consumption of coal that *Lusitania* was famous for (over the recommended full-speed zigzag) and thus apparently prevailed.

The bridge lost the ship's position in the fog and this also influenced speed and course. After the weather cleared, Turner made the fateful decision to recalibrate the ship's navigation ordinates using visible land markers. This required that the ship proceed near shore (instead of mid-channel), at a constant (slow) speed, and on a straight course relative to land. After fixing *Lusitania's* position, Turner made a deliberate and dramatic course correction of more than thirty degrees.[55] [56] As it turned out, it was this correction that inadvertently put *Lusitania* within reach of the U-20 - which had already sighted the liner and was in chase. Failure to follow the steerage, course, and speed

[55] Thomas Bailey and Herman Bauer and Walther Schwieger, "German Documents Relating to the Lusitania", 335.

[56] *A Formal Inquiry into the Loss of the Steamship Lusitania,* sess 50-51.

precautions was widely criticized and deeply probed in the various post-disaster inquiries that were held regarding *Lusitania*.

CHAPTER IV

THE ADMIRALTY'S ORDERS

The threat to Allied shipping by the German submarine force was in direct response to (and perhaps mirrored) the threat to Germany posed by Britain's own protracted starvation blockade when she mined the North Sea and ruthlessly intercepted supplies bound for Germany. Although almost every European belligerent possessed submarines of their own, it was Germany alone who recognized the submarine's considerable strategic value and accordingly allocated resources to its prolific development. The British, in contrast, saw the battleship as the premier weapon system and since the turn of the century rebuilt its Navy around the powerful Dreadnought class battleship.

The submarine was a relatively new naval asset when the war began. It could be deployed quickly and inexpensively with relative stealth. While they were vulnerable on the surface and carried limited capacity to attack or defend, anti-submarine warfare was in its infancy at the outbreak of the war and submarines were much more quickly and inexpensively replaced than most other warships. Britain's primary vulnerability in war was its extended supply lines. It built massive redundancy in its civilian fleet to insure that it could receive the resources necessary to conduct war without interruption. The

Germans believed the submarine to be a superior weapons system to disrupt Allied supplies. Furthermore, the rules for engagement involving submarines were often unclear, underdeveloped, or in some cases non-existent, conveying greater flexibility (and at times greater autonomy and stricter accountability) to the German fleet.

The submarine gave Germany a superior weapon against its enemy's chief vulnerability. Germany also possessed the added advantage of defining for itself how that weapon could be used. As England's blockade tightened, Germany intended to extend its submarine fleet towards civilian shipping and passenger transport craft belonging to its adversaries. Facing the challenge of defending itself against an enemy it often could not see or hear, the British (who possessed the largest civilian fleet in the world) developed strategies which the captain of a British-owned or operated ship must follow when approaching the British Isles from the North Sea. These strategies were operationalized in the form of General Admiralty Orders:

1. To avoid headlands, where U-boats typically hunted
2. To steer a mid-channel course
3. To operate at full speed off harbors
4. To preserve wireless silence within 100 miles of land, save for an emergency
5. To post extra lookouts
6. To maintain lifeboats ready for lowering and provisioned
7. To keep on the move outside ports and harbors
8. To steer a zigzag course [57]

[57] Kent Layton, *Lusitania*, 259.

Although these orders - created under the authority of the British Admiralty - were meant to lower the chances of a ship being attacked or sunk by a U-boat, they did not promise immunity. Nor did they relieve the executive officers aboard a ship of their authority or accountabilities. In addition to the standing orders, which were modified frequently as submarine conduct became better understood, the Admiralty issued ship-specific instructions and allocated scarce resources such as escorts, as circumstances dictated. History shows that these strategies and orders were simply not enough. Germany could make submarines faster than Britain could counter their effects. Monthly Allied losses to submarine attacks rose to a peak of nearly 900,000 tons (see Exhibit III) before America entered the war.

New Technology Challenges Accepted Rules of War

The only guarantee of the ship's safety lay in its national registration under a neutral power not yet at war with either of the belligerent powers. Early in the war, neutrally-operated ships such as the United States passenger liner *New York* were allowed to safely enter the designated submarine war zone surrounding the British Isles. Such ships were required to display internationally accepted forms of identification along their hull and within the superstructure. However, even strict adherence was not failsafe.

Identifying a ship in rough water through a periscope was fraught with error. In addition to the "fog of war," identification such as this was open to abuse. The accepted rules of warfare for the time would concede that a ship belonging to a belligerent power that used a neutral flag and identification markings to protect itself and crew from attack,

would be considered outside the accepted rules of war. Obviously, such a law of the sea proved too difficult to effectively enforce. In the case of submarines in particular, new rules of engagement were frequently being formed and reformed. Public opinion often lagged the reality that submarine technology presented, as both sides struggled with establishing the moral norms for the deployment of a new and deadly weapon system.

Numerous other protocols of the time were not infrequently observed or disregarded entirely. A submarine was to warn its prey of imminent attack and allow time for the passengers and crew to abandon ship. Early in the war, the expectation was that a crew from the submarine was to go aboard the ship and inspect its manifest to search for contraband cargo that would justify sinking the ship. Early conventions also prohibited attacking survivors in lifeboats or those in the water. Because of Germany's elevated use of the submarine, they would eventually dismiss these and other rules of engagement by declaring unrestricted submarine warfare. This coincided with a dramatic increase in Allied losses beginning in the Spring of 1915 (see Exhibit III). Germany unilaterally abandoned these practices because of the danger they imposed on the submarine and its crew - particularly while the submarine was on the surface. Submarines were most vulnerable to attack on the surface by ships that rammed or were armed with guns. In addition, the considerable time it took to abandon and search a ship was frequently time enough for nearby ships to respond to distress calls and descend on the area and a vulnerable target.

This scenario was best illustrated in February of 1915. The submarine war zone was first announced internationally and the *Lusitania* was steaming towards Liverpool in

what would be its last full round trip of the Atlantic route. When the ship entered the war zone, Captain Daniel Dow became concerned due to the possibility of the ship being torpedoed. Unknown to Captain Dow, the German government had assigned a two week period in which ships and their commercial interests could familiarize and prepare themselves for the submarine blockade before it became active. Not knowing this information, Captain Dow had a full-sized American flag erected at the stern and also had a small American flag and mail pennant flown from the ship's forepeak. Captain Dow later explained the reason for erecting the American flags at various points on the ship was *not* to try to hide its identity from German submariners (rather unlikely to mislead given *Lusitania's* distinct features), but rather to inform any submarines in the vicinity that the *Lusitania* was carrying American passengers.[58] The *Lusitania* steamed at full speed (21 - 25 knots) straight to the safety of Liverpool without an attack coming against the ship.

The British government defended Captain Dow's decision to fly the American flag, and passengers and crew applauded it.[59] The German government protested the event and the American government sent a weak protest itself to the British. Not unexpectedly, the British response to the Americans was an equally weak reply. The *Lusitania* would not be the last and only ship to try to hide behind a neutral flag. The German Empire continued its diplomatic protests in earnest over such abuses, but no power heeded them. In fact, Britain allowed its captains to continue this practice to save

[58] Ibid., 253.

[59] Ibid

their ships, crew and cargoes from destruction. In response to the continued disheveling of the accepted rules of warfare, the use of neutral flags on belligerent ships would be a prime factor in Germany's decision to declare unrestricted submarine warfare in 1917.

Entering The Warzone

On May 6th - one day prior to its sinking - the *Lusitania* had entered the German submarine warzone. As detailed in the special instructions provided by the Admiralty to British merchant ship captains, the main lifeboats were swung out over the water, prepared for lowering and properly provisioned.[60] The collapsible lifeboats however, were left fastened and held to the deck per the orders of Captain Turner who did not want to have the boats sliding around or off the ship in the event of rough seas.[61] Most of the bulkhead doors throughout the ship had been lowered that morning and stationed lookouts were doubled on each side of the ship and at the crow's nest. Two officers along with quartermasters were assigned on each side of the bridge at all times.[62] The *Lusitania's* name on the bow and registration numbers were painted over at the beginning of the war. Her identification and nationality flags were taken down upon entering the warzone.[63] At the beginning of the war, *Lusitania's* hull and part of her superstructure was painted black to camouflage the ship at night. As an additional precaution, she was

[60] *A Formal Inquiry into the Loss of the Steamship Lusitania,* sess 31.

[61] *Ibid.,* sess 23.

[62] *Ibid.,* sess 25.

[63] *Ibid.,* sess 30.

not permitted to turn on any electric light during the night hours. Crew and passengers had to navigate the ship by oil lantern only.

In addition to these precautions, the Lusitania received a coded, wireless telegram from the British Admiralty through the Valencia Wireless station on the morning of May 6th. The message was clear: submarines were active off of the south coast of Ireland and off of Fastnet Rock which was not far from the Old Head of Kinsale.[64] According to the testimony of Captain William Turner, at 2:15PM the ship was 15 miles off of the Old Head of Kinsale. The Head was a rocky outcropping with a lighthouse which juts out into the English Channel from the Irish mainland close to the town of Kinsale[65]

The Admiralty's instructions were unambiguous in regard to the nature and location of the threat that afternoon. "German submarines appear to be operating chiefly off prominent headlands and landfalls. Ships should give prominent headlands a wide berth"[66] Merchant ships were to avoid headlands by giving them a wide space and were to keep a mid-channel course in order to compromise a German submarine's use of prominent landmarks and headlands as navigation points. In fact, both submarines and merchant ships depended on landmarks such as Fastnet Rock and the Old Head of Kinsale for daytime navigation. However, under these compromised conditions, surface ships had advantages over submarines. Submarines were required to surface to fix

[64] *Ibid.,* sess 32-33.

[65] *Ibid.,* sess 15.

[66] *Ibid.,* sess 31.

coordinates while merchant ships could constantly process any alternative navigation signals, be they intermittent or random.

On balance, a mid-channel course slightly advantaged the *Lusitania*. However, were the ship to be attacked, the course ordered by the Admiralty might make rescue and recovery operations more difficult. Rescuers would be burdened by an uncertain location of a daytime attack and by greater distances from the wreck site to shore. A mid-channel position would also limit the options available to the captain and crew to reach port or to save the ship by grounding her.

Besides the course of his ship, Captain Turner had been instructed to also keep away from Headlands, to travel at full speed and to adopt a zigzagging cruise pattern while in the declared warzone. The speed & zig-zag pattern worked well in tandem and were universally considered a superior kill-zone maneuver. Executed in concert, these actions had the effect of reducing the target's footprint in a periscope, made an assessment of speed & identity less certain, and placed a merchant ship in an offensive position that might force the submarine to submerge prematurely. While these instructions were sent and received with the warning of submarine activity, they were also acknowledged. However, none were followed by the *Lusitania*.

Weather conditions, Cunard commercial interests, and the captain's desire to secure navigational certainty all played a role in the failure to execute the Admiralty's instructions. The *Lusitania* encountered dense, encroaching fog on the morning of May 7th. In light of the deteriorating conditions, Captain Turner ordered that the speed of the

ship be reduced from 18 knots to 15 knots.[67] The speed was increased back to 18 knots when the fog cleared. The Lusitania's maximum speed was widely acknowledged as 24 knots. However commercial interests prevailed.

The war had negatively impacted the passenger liner business in Europe. Demand was down compared to the pre-war years, as fewer Europeans had the means or interest to travel by sea outside the continent. Fuel consumption was one of the largest expenses in operating a passenger liner and while Lusitania was fast, it also consumed immense amounts of coal. The war had increased military demand for coal and its price therefore rose dramatically. Cunard had decided to conserve fuel and instructed Turner to shut down six of the ships twenty-five operating boilers, leaving only 19 operational.[68] This singularly economic measure reduced the maximum speed of the ship from 24 to 21 knots.

In addition to Admiralty orders and Cunard operating directives, Captain Turner was also considering natural constraints such as trade winds and tides when he considered *Lusitania's* speed and course. Captain Turner's original voyage plan had already been altered by a delayed launch out of New York – at the request of the Admiralty. The plan had been designed to meet the Admiralty's expectations that the *Lusitania* reach her scheduled port of Liverpool the following morning. The Admiralty instructions dated February 10, 1915 stated that "So far as consistent with the particular trades and states of tides, vessels should sail at dusk and make their ports at dawn."

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[67] *Ibid.,* sess 40.

[68] *Ibid.,* sess 3.

Captain Turner had received a copy of these instructions before the voyage.[69] Preceding the attack, the *Lusitania* was about 240 miles away from the sandbar that juts out from the Mersey River and on which Liverpool sits.[70] A steering pilot was to be picked up off the bar to guide the ship on a safe course through deep water over the bar and into the Mersey River. The Mersey River bar *could only be crossed at high tide* due to the shallow depth of the water and the deep displacement of Lusitania. Stopping to pick up the pilot hence reduced the possibility that the ship would run aground, while adding to its exposure in a narrow area of the channel vulnerable to attack.

The enemy also understood this logistical constraint. Submarine patrols thus hunted the waters around the entrance to the Mersey River bar. Captain Turner calculated that if he went any faster than 18 knots that the *Lusitania* would arrive at the Liverpool bar *before* the peak tide of 6:53AM the following day and would be effectively snared in a trap – figuratively a "sitting duck". Hence, when the Irish coast was spotted around 8AM on the morning of May 7th, the *Lusitania's* speed was reduced from 21 to 18 knots.[71] While within sight of familiar navigational markers, the ship's course was also altered to accommodate Turner to get a precise fix on his ship's location before beginning the final leg of the passage. Turner intended to arrive at the Liverpool bar at the peak high tide when the water level was deepest in order to *forgo picking up a pilot* and instead just

[69] *Ibid.,* sess 31.

[70] *Ibid.,* sess 40.

[71] *Ibid.,* sess 45.

steam straight into the Mersey River at a fast speed right out of the Irish Channel.[72] Turner was aware that this maneuver relied on precise navigation and speed. The consequences of being wrong on either account were potentially significant. Arriving at the bar before peak high tide would have forced Captain Turner to run the *Lusitania* in a circular pattern near the mouth of the River until a high water mark presented itself again or a pilot could be picked up. Even though this would be in line with Admiralty instructions to keep on the move outside ports and harbors it would also present the *Lusitania* as a vulnerable target to enemy submarines who were known to operate off Liverpool. Arriving late to the mouth of the river carried the risk that the ship might run aground and again be indefensible against attack.

The reduction in speed and the change in course to fix navigation prepared the *Lusitania* to 'run the gauntlet' as Turner had planned and as the Admiralty had instructed. However, these maneuvers also played into Germany's hands. Given the location of the U-20 in the early morning of May 7th, it is unlikely that the submarine would have intercepted the Lusitania had she maintained speed and course. In fact, military historians believe that if the Lusitania had simply been traveling at its top achievable speed of 24 or even 21 knots – regardless of course - she would have possibly never met the U-20 in the first place, due to the set of circumstances which allowed both vessels to be found in their exact positions right before the U-20's torpedo was fired.[73]

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[72] *Ibid.,* sess 59.

[73] Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster*, 202.

Even though Turner's failure to follow Admiralty's instructions regarding speed and mid-channel course substantively explains how the *Lusitania* found itself in harm's way, it does not entirely account for the direct hit the ship sustained. The third element of the Admiralty's instruction that Turner ignored dealt with the course of the ship. The exact Admiralty instructions were worded as follows:

> *War experience has shown that fast steamers can considerably reduce the chance of a successful surprise submarine attack by zigzagging – that is to say, altering course at short and irregular interval, say, ten minutes to half an hour*

Captain Turner did not order the ship steered on a zigzag course. Turner later testified that he believed a master of a ship only needed to zigzag *after* a submarine was spotted in order to foul the torpedo's firing solution.[74] In other words, the Captain believed the steerage recommended by the Admiralty did not prevent surprise attack, but rather impeded accurate targeting of the torpedo. Captain Turner claimed these instructions only to be of effective use if a submarine or its periscope was actually spotted by the crew of a ship. This interpretation now seems remarkable for an experienced shipmaster like Turner. However in the Spring of 1915, Turner's life-long commercial career may not have prepared him for the advanced weapons systems (such as the high speed torpedo and attack submarine) that could be turned on his ship. His misinterpretation of Admiralty instructions can hardly be explained away by ignorance or naiveté. Its consequences were disastrous.

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[74] *A Formal Inquiry into the Loss of the Steamship Lusitania,* sess 54-55.

Early twentieth century submarines were notoriously difficult to position for a successful attack. Once positioned, the WWI vintage firing systems were not sophisticated enough to lock on a target. Torpedo technology itself was relatively primitive and unreliable by modern standards and therefore random changes in direction by a merchant ship (zigzagging) created difficulties in positioning a U-Boat as well as in predicting the position of the target as it and the torpedo converged. "The underwater speed of a submarine is very low, and it is exceedingly difficult for her to get into a position to deliver an attack unless she can observe and predict the course of the ship attacked."[75]

Therefore, if Captain Turner had been periodically changing the direction of his ship instead of the straight course parallel to the familiar coastal markings in which the *Lusitania* was actually steaming, the U-20's targeting system may not have been as accurate as it was. In fact under such steerage conditions, the ship would have been at an advantage over a German submarine in terms of maneuverability and therefore would have had a greater chance of avoiding or limiting the attack. The importance of *Lusitania's* course and steerage is highlighted in the mission log of the U-20. Kapitanleutnant Walther Schwieger sighted the *Lusitania* on a perpendicular course with his submarine as logged in the following observation "Ahead and to starboard four funnels and two masts of a steamer with course perpendicular to us come into sight

[75] *Ibid.,* sess 32.

(coming from SSW it steered toward Galley Head). Ship is made out to be large passenger steamer."[76]

During the Mersey Inquiry, Captain Turner expressed doubt that he would have been able to make it to the Mersey bar at peak tide if he had been zigzagging. Turner's calculations and his judgment were later challenged by the testimony of Commander Anderson of the Royal Navy. Commander Anderson was questioned extensively during the Mersey Inquiry about submarine avoidance measures. Anderson acknowledged that a fast ship had a considerable advantage over a slower ship in escaping a submarine attack and that zigzagging in submarine waters was of paramount importance. The Commander also calculated that if *Lusitania* had traveled at 21 knots instead of 18 knots, zigzagged, and steamed in mid-channel the *Lusitania* could have made it over to the Liverpool Bar on May 8 at high tide and would have been able to steam right through the Bar without picking up a pilot.[77] This testimony openly criticized Turner's calculations and clearly questioned the judgment he used to make the fateful trade-offs he did.

The facts are that the Admiralty's recommendations and Cunard's operating accountabilities represented an irreconcilable set of instructions. As captain, Turner was responsible to resolve the conflicts these instructions created. *Lusitania* could not proceed at full speed *and* save fuel. Nor could she zigzag *and* pass safely through the Mersey River bar at high tide on the planned arrival date. While the Admiralty could be criticized for delaying Lusitania's departure, for not providing escort, or for denying

[76] Thomas Bailey and Herman Bauer and Walther Schwieger, "German Documents Relating to the Lusitania", 335.

[77] *A Formal Inquiry into the Loss of the Steamship Lusitania,* sess 95.

Juno's deployment out of Queenstown; the warnings and instructions they provided *Lusitania* on May 6th and 7th were clear and most likely would have been effective had they been followed. Even these criticisms of the Admiralty should arguably be muted since the decisions it made were made in the larger context of the war and the allocation of scarce resources. In contrast, Captain Turner's only considerations were those of the safe passage of the single ship under his command.

Thus, due to a combination of circumstances ranging from Captain Turner's misjudgment and failure to follow Admiralty instructions, overhanging commercial interests, and navigation difficulties, the *Lusitania* was presented as a perfect *target of opportunity* to the U-20 on the afternoon of Friday May 7, 1915.

CHAPTER V

THE ATTACK

The torpedo wasn't spotted until it was only 500 yards away from impacting *Lusitania's* hull. Of the eight crewmembers posted on watch, only Able Seaman Leslie Morton on the ship's starboard bow of the Forecastle deck saw the torpedo.[78] However, Morton was desperate to warn his brother sleeping below decks of the danger and only shouted a single warning into the megaphone connected to the bridge. He then abandoned his post without waiting for an acknowledgement.[79] Morton acknowledged under oath that a full 30 seconds elapsed from him sighting the torpedo to it hitting the ship. Proper seamanship of the time called for continual warnings to be directed at the bridge until the warnings were acknowledged by the officers as having been received.[80]

Had the officers actually heard Morton's first and only warning, the ship would have had time to execute evasive maneuvers. Maneuvers recommended by the Admiralty included turning the ship immediately toward the foam path of the torpedo and an immediate surge in forward speed. A crash course towards the submarine was the most

[78] *Ibid.,* sess 97.

[79] *Ibid.,* sess 105.

[80] *Ibid.,* sess 98.

prudent action to have taken as this would have forced the attacking submarine out of firing position; to quickly dive to avoid getting rammed. This course of action also presented *Lusitania* as a smaller, narrower target to any ensuing torpedoes launched.

The officers on the bridge did not hear Morton's alert. The consequences of this procedural failure were immediate and severe. It wasn't until Able Seaman Thomas Quinn up in the Crow's Nest spotted the torpedo only 200 yards away (12 seconds from impact) that warning of the torpedo speeding towards the liner was acknowledged.[81] The strike could have been avoided if Leslie Morton had continued to shout warnings to the bridge and the officers had heard and acknowledged these warnings. By the time Thomas Quinn had his urgent warning acknowledged by the bridge, time had run out for the *Lusitania*.

As it was, U20's single torpedo struck near the number 1 boiler room below the waterline. The open bulkhead doors in the engine room and elsewhere likely contributed to the rapid flooding of the ship, a loss of steerage control, and an inability to slow the ship down adequately to safely deploy lifeboats. The crew and passengers were unknowingly trapped in a closing vise. On one side, the ship was sinking quickly, leaving little time - or margin for error - to get everyone off the ship. On the other side, the deployment of the only means of escape (*Lusitania's* numerous lifeboats) was delayed by Turner's hesitant order to abandon ship, by the ship's residual speed & severity of list, and by the pronounced confusion on deck. Launching lifeboats while the

[81] *Ibid.,* sess 94.

ship was traveling at such a high residual speed would have flooded the insides and spilled the passengers into the sea as soon as they touched the water.

The *Lusitania* immediately began to list to the starboard side, compounding the rapidly deteriorating conditions. The ship's list – which was eventually observed at 30^{o} together with the ship's speed made it nearly impossible to get the lifeboats safely in the water.[82] The port side boats were unable to clear Lusitania's protruding hull at a 30^{o} list. Many of these boats where ripped apart as they were lowered over the rivets holding the ship's steel hull plates in place, thus spilling or killing passengers and crew who fell helplessly into the sea. Only one boat was successfully launched from the port side.[83]

In addition, the list was so severe that it made mobility on and below deck treacherous and time consuming. Time was in short supply after the torpedo struck. With bulkheads closed near the ship's main staircases, electric elevators were the only means of escape for many of the crew stationed below deck.[84] Emergency generators engaged a few minutes after the torpedo's explosion, but were disabled four minutes later.[85] Many experienced seamen with critical responsibilities in the event of abandoning the ship, were trapped below deck, leaving gaps in the chain of command and the fulfillment of critical responsibilities. Therefore, in addition to having little time and

[82] Diana Preston, *Lusitania*, 215.

[83] Ibid., 220.

[84] Ibid., 209.

[85] Ibid.

carrying a full passenger manifest, the *Lusitania* did not have enough experienced sailors in position to effectively execute her abandonment.

Panic and confusion engulfed the passengers despite the efforts of the (overwhelmed) crew. One passenger, Margaret Cox recalled, "everyone was just beating everybody" as passengers scrambled toward the boat deck.[86] Chief First-Class Steward Robert Barnes was trying to keep passengers calm as they moved toward the main staircase. Barnes found that the initial calm dissolved quickly as the ship listed further. He later recounted, "It took us quite a few minutes to get up the stairs there was such a lot of people pushing and pulling their way up. I was calling out, "Take your time, she's not going down", but I really thought different."[87] The failure of the emergency generators plunged the interior of the ship into darkness and added to the terror.

Lusitania's list also impeded loading the starboard side lifeboats by complicating normal Promenade Deck operations. While passengers initially moved toward Promenade Deck stations for loading as they had been instructed, many realized any port-side escape from the ship would be impossible. As a result, passengers desperately seeking a way into a lifeboat overran the starboard side boat stations and their crews. The list was so great that lifeboats swung out as if a pendulum from the upper Boat Deck. Seeing the difficulty the crews had in bringing the lifeboats in close enough to the Promenade Deck for loading, many passengers scrambled up to the boat deck which was not equipped to accommodate - much less load - passengers. This further impeded launching lifeboats

[86] Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. *Oral History Interviews on the Sinking of the Lusitania.* Margaret Cox. 1965. 6 (Compact Disc).

[87] Diana Preston, *Lusitania*, 203.

since the boat deck crew was required to redirect frightened passengers off of the Boat Deck and down already crowded stairwells. This took an already depleted crew away from the essential task of releasing boats from their harnesses and carefully operating the winches to lower the boats to the Promenade Deck for loading.

CHAPTER VI
ABANDON SHIP PROCEEDINGS

Captain Turner delayed his order to abandon ship until several minutes after the torpedo struck the *Lusitania*. As the ship's list exceeded 15^{o} starboard, Turner ordered all lifeboats lowered to the rail. He also ordered Staff Captain Anderson to supervise "all women and children first"[88] and all remaining officers to the boat stations. The wireless room was told to make immediate contact with the coastal naval station to request rescue operations be put underway immediately.

Minutes later, Turner left the bridge in full uniform with a life jacket on, appeared on the upper deck, and reversed his orders to Anderson and the crews operating the winches. He halted the lowering of the boats and ordered everyone out of them.[89] Turner told passengers "that there was no danger and that the ship would float."[90] This order came ten minutes after the ship had been struck and only eight minutes before Lusitania would slip beneath the waves. It corresponded with a temporary, but pronounced reduction of the *Lusitania's* list. The captain's commands were not generally acted on, although some passengers did retreat to their staterooms, believing the worst had passed.

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[88] Ibid., 201.

[89] Ibid., 216.

[90] Charles Lauriat, *The Lusitania's Last Voyage* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1915), 9.

Despite an ample supply on board and the best efforts of the ship's stewards to distribute them, many passengers were without lifejackets when they reached the lifeboat stations. Of those who had them, many were not able to properly secure their jacket in the panic that had ensued. Children were particularly vulnerable. Stewards John Jones, Marian Bird, and Fannie Morecroft hurried from deck to deck calming passengers but also urging them to get to the higher decks with their lifejackets as soon as possible. They retrieved the lifejackets of forgetful and panicked passengers who were without them. The three also went back through each room of their sections to ensure no one was left behind.[91] By most surviving passenger accounts, *Lusitania's* stewards and staff comported themselves with courage and compassion throughout the ordeal of abandoning the ship.

Lusitania carried lifejackets enough for 3,000 people and had lifeboat capacity for over 2,600. The ship's safety inspection conducted prior to leaving New York documented the following manifest:

- 22 life boats which carried 68 persons each
- 20 Chambers collapsible boats carrying 54 each
- 12 McLean-Chambers collapsible boats with a capacity of 49 each
- 2 Henderson collapsible boats, carrying 43 each
- 14 life rafts, with capacities varying from 20 to 40 each.[92]

Most of the lifesaving apparatus of the ship went with her to the grave. The collapsible boats were particularly vulnerable to loss as the depleted crew focused on the

[91] Diana Preston, *Lusitania*, 214.

[92] The Lusitania Resource. "Lifeboats." , accessed February, 2014, http://www.rmslusitania.info/lifeboats/.

high capacity long boats that were ready for launch. The collapsible boats had wooden bottoms and canvas sides which had to be pulled up and clipped into place with supports. This was a relatively time consuming and manpower-intensive prospect compared to the long boats. In addition, many of the collapsible boats were unable to be released from their rusted harnesses.

Of the twenty-two "long boats", only six were successfully launched, all but one from the starboard side.[93] The crew attempted to launch two other port-side lifeboats but these did not survive the process of lowering and broke apart on the ships hull, casting all passengers and crew into the sea.

[93] Ibid.

CHAPTER VII

RESCUE & RECOVERY OPERATIONS

At 2:11pm, the *Lusitania's* distress signal was broadcast by wireless operators Robert Leith and David McCormick. The message read:

"SOS, SOS, SOS. COME AT ONCE. BIG LIST. 10 MILES SOUTH OF OLD KINSALE. MFA"[94]

The SOS call reached and was acknowledged by the various wireless stations located along the southern Irish coastline. The message (requesting rescue) was then relayed and received by the wireless operator at the Queenstown Naval center some twenty-five miles away from the sinking vessel.[95] The area commander - Vice Admiral Sir Charles H. Coke of the local Queenstown Patrol naval squadron whose duty was to patrol the waters around the port city - ordered all the patrol craft that were available at

[94] *A Formal Inquiry into the Loss of the Steamship Lusitania,* sess 134.

[95] Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster*, 173.

the time to the scene of the disaster to assist in rescuing survivors.[96] The Queenstown patrol included forty vessels varying in size and type including three old torpedo boats and a mixture of obsolete naval patrol craft and armed fishing trawlers.[97] That afternoon, fourteen of these small and nimble craft offered superior handling and maneuverability than was available in the unofficial flagship of the squadron: the cruiser *H.M.S. Juno.*

The *Juno* was the only Navy ship in the area capable of engaging the enemy. Author Colin Simpson argues that on the day before the attack, Vice Admiral Coke had ordered *Juno* to terminate its patrol to provide escort for the *Lusitania*. However, the *Juno's* escort mission was subsequently scuttled on Admiralty's orders and she returned to port. The Admiralty had calculated that although available, the *Juno* presented a large and vulnerable target to the German submarines believed to be patrolling nearby. Should the German U-boats take out the *Juno*, an essential shipping lane would be exposed to nearly unimpeded enemy control until a replacement warship could be dispatched from the North Atlantic Theater. Although logical and consistent, Simpson's assertions regarding the *Juno* have never been substantiated by those directly involved in the *Lusitania* affair.

It seems likely that, facing the prospect of potentially altering the balance of power along the Irish coast, the Admiralty rescinded two of Admiral Coke's orders in less than three hours. One order (the rescinded order for *Juno* to provide escort) may have prevented the attack or otherwise limited the damage and subsequent loss of life. The

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[96] "Cunard Offices here Besieged For News; Fate of 1,918 on Lusitania Long in Doubt." *New York Times,* May 8, 1915.

[97] Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster*, 145.

other, which we explore further, may have enhanced recovery operations once the ship was lost. It seems reasonable to conclude that if either of Admiral Coke's orders where allowed to stand, *Lusitania's* severe loss of life may have been mitigated, if not avoided entirely.

The rescue operation began almost immediately after receiving the relayed distress call from Leith and McCormick onboard the *Lusitania*. Admiral Coke ordered the cruiser *Juno*, steamers *Blubell* & *Flying Fish*, tugs *Warrior*, *Stormcock*, & *Julia*, and 5 trawlers to the reported area where the Lusitania disaster was unfolding.[98] Coke was also aware that numerous small fishing craft were also being dispatched to the scene.

However, at 3pm, the Admiralty interceded (perhaps) for the second time that day to recall the *Juno*. Having received and executed Admiralty's orders, Coke was now resigned to the fact that the smaller craft would be the British Navy's representation at the scene of the disaster which unfolded with the *Lusitania*.[99] Coke's most substantive ship remained in port. He did not know at the time that the *Lusitania* was gone at 2:28 that afternoon, seventeen minutes after issuing her first distress call.

The *Wanderer* – a small, private fishing boat from the nearby Island of Man – was the first to the scene. The *Wanderer* managed to rescue nearly 200 survivors and towed two of the six lifeboats recovered eight miles to where it was intercepted and relieved by the Navy tug *Flying Fish*. Such would be the pattern for the remainder of rescue operations. Smaller boats would move into and around the debris field picking up

[98] Diana Preston, *Lusitania*, 263.

[99] Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster*, 173.

survivors, as well as the dead. Without a sufficiently large vessel on the scene to accept survivors, the few lifeboats in service were towed to safety but were not able to be returned to the disaster site in time to further assist with the operations.

Some historians such as Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan speculate that the cruiser *Juno*, with its long length, wide berth, and relatively fast cruising speed would indeed have been able to rescue a larger number of survivors more quickly than the smaller squadron and civilian craft scrambled from port that day. The *Juno* was reported to have had a design speed of 19.5 knots (equivalent to 22mph) under full steam and it would have been able to make it to the area of the sinking within an hour and a half of being ordered out of Queenstown. As it was, the first of Vice Admiral Coke's rescue craft reached the perimeter of the debris field approximately two hours after the *Lusitania* had disappeared from sight.[100] The *Juno* was ordered out to the disaster area by Vice Admiral Coke soon after the wireless distress message was received at Queenstown even though it was against British Admiralty wartime protocol. Vice Admiral Coke ignored protocol and wanted instead to send every available craft to the scene of the sinking to assist in the rescue of survivors. The *Juno* left the harbor at 3:00pm and came upon Roche Point which was less than 20 miles away from the survivors when she was abruptly ordered back to Queenstown by Vice Admiral Coke.[101] Coke's intention in sending out the *Juno* to the *Lusitania* was for it to aid in the *transfer of passengers* from the various small craft

[100] Ibid., 174.

[101] Ibid., 175.

on the scene that could then be quickly redeployed back into the debris field to search for more survivors.

Therefore in Coke's view, the *Juno* was integral to maximizing the modest assets available to the rescue operation. Thirty minutes after the *Juno* left Queenstown harbor, Coke learned by wireless that the *Lusitania* had already disappeared. Although he executed the Admiralty's orders to have *Juno* return to port, he was uncertain that the other craft in the area would be able to effectively rescue survivors on their own.[102] What the Vice Admiral *was* certain of however, was the existence of the imminent U-boat threat that was underscored by *Lusitania's* misfortune. Germany had previously torpedoed rescue vessels during evacuation and rescue procedures. The *Juno* might suffer a similar fate and this could have tactical consequences for the conduct of the blockade.

The patrol flotilla was joined outside the harbor by a British steamer the *SS Westborough* which was flying Greek colors and sported the name *Katrina* as a submarine deterrent.[103] Ironically, the strategy that the *Lusitania* once employed to escape torpedo attack was being used on a ship that arrived on the scene of the *Lusitania's* demise from the same weapon.

Various small fishing vessels, tugs, and tenders made up the additional units heading to the *Lusitania's* last known position. One of the craft unique to the situation was the *Courtmacsherry Lifeboat* which had set out at 3pm with 12 men rowing furiously towards the position of the *Lusitania's* sinking. The *Courtmacsherry* was quickly

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[102] Ibid.

[103] *A Formal Inquiry into the Loss of the Steamship Lusitania,* sess 269.

deployed after being alerted by its coxswain mate who had witnessed the sinking on shore and rushed to gather the crew.[104] The *Courtmacsherry Lifeboat* would take three hours to reach the scene of the disaster. It would recover more deceased victims than survivors.

Owing to the rapid submergence of the *Lusitania*, only six lifeboats in various forms of damage and decay would be towed to Queenstown.[105] The number of survivors occupying the lifeboats depended on a range of factors. The hulls of several lifeboats were compromised during their release (descent) from the ship and were unable to support their specified capacity. Others were partially swamped due to overloading and the panic of those trying to climb into them from the water.

The water temperature in the Irish Sea at the time was approximately 52°. Hypothermia set in quickly for those in the water, but also affected those in partially submerged lifeboats. At that temperature, exhaustion or unconsciousness set in within 30-60 minutes. Since *Lusitania* was without escort, the closest rescue vessels were at best, two hours away. This meant that anyone fortunate enough to have gotten off the ship and to have survived *Lusitania's* rush to the sea bottom, was in grave danger if not in a lifeboat. Survival times for the average person in water of that temperature is roughly between 1 – 3 hours, depending on their clothing and whether or not a lifejacket was secured. Without a lifejacket, exhaustion or unconsciousness would likely mean death by drowning. The onset of hypothermia and eventual drowning would have been accelerated

[104] Diana Preston, *Lusitania*, 260.

[105] *A Formal Inquiry into the Loss of the Steamship Lusitania,* sess 74.

by the chilly water temperature of the early Spring and by the low position of the sun in the sky that afternoon.

Given the distance and time *Lusitania's* rescuers had to cover from Queenstown, the inability of *Lusitania's* crew to ensure that each passenger had properly donned a lifejacket directly impacted the number of survivors. Both passenger and crew accounts of the disaster refer to significant numbers of people with improperly worn lifejackets or without them at all. Of the 1,201 victims of the *Lusitania* disaster, only 289 bodies were recovered.[106] This suggests that a large number of people were unaccounted for as they were either trapped on the ship or in the water without a lifejacket as *Lusitania* went down. Those in the water in close vicinity to the ship were most likely pulled to the bottom by the effect of the siphon created by the ship as it descended.

An example of the dangers inherent in spending too much time in cold waters is highlighted by the case of *Lusitania* survivor Mrs. Mabel Henshaw. Mrs. Henshaw escaped the *Lusitania* with a lifejacket correctly fastened on her. However, within a short time the cold temperatures began giving her painful cramps throughout her body. Wracked with pain and exhausted, Henshaw was forced to lie on her back in the water before she lost consciousness.[107] After being pulled from the water by the steamer *Blue Bell*, Mrs. Henshaw was mistaken by crewmembers for a dead body and placed in a pile of other corpses. The blanket covering the bodies warmed Mrs. Henshaw's body

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[106] Online Website Administrator. "Lusitania Tragedy to be Remembered in Cobh." *The Cobh Edition,* April 29, 2013, 2013, sec. Local News.

[107] Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. *Oral History Interviews on the Sinking of the Lusitania.* Mabel Henshaw. 1965. 3 (Compact Disc).

temperature enough so that she awoke and caught the eye of the crewmembers by making enough movement to differentiate herself from the lifeless forms surrounding her.[108]

The loss of consciousness in the bitter sea that afternoon was a frequent occurrence for those in the water. If countermeasures weren't already in place - such as a correctly fastened lifejacket or being otherwise secured to an object that had good buoyancy – unconsciousness and subsequent death by drowning occurred long before rescue boats arrived. Twenty-one year old Doris Maud Charles who was with her father, forty-eight year old Joseph Charles on the return voyage to their home in England, lost consciousness after some time swimming in the water with her father connected by locked arms. Miss Charles was saved from certain drowning because of both her father's treading of water and sometime later, a partially filled lifeboat from the ship came alongside them. The lifeboat passengers recognized the father and daughter's peril and helped them both to safety.[109] The kindness of others, particularly the *Lusitania* crew member manning the lifeboat allowed the Charles's to escape the fate of most others in their situation. The lifeboat continued to dutifully search for movement among the bodies in the water, but few had survived as long as Doris Charles and her father. Eventually, the lifeboat containing the Charles's and others was towed to safety by the tug *Flying Fish*.

The forty year old Boston bookseller Charles Lauriat found and boarded a heavily damaged collapsible lifeboat. Lauriat was a first class passenger and along with fellow

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[108] Ibid.

[109] Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. *Oral History Interviews on the Sinking of the Lusitania.* Doris Maud Charles. 1965. 4 (Compact Disc).

American passenger Fred Gauntlett, forty-five, and twenty-seven year old British seaman James Brooks managed to jerry-rig the boat into an operational condition.[110] All three men took turns rowing the compromised, and barely seaworthy craft towards land while picking up dozens of survivors. The lifeboat was still some miles from shore when the boat was overtaken by the local fishing vessel *Peel 12* and the survivors were taken aboard.[111] According to the testimony of Charles Lauriat, this small fishing vessel was already grossly overcrowded with survivors having taken onboard the passengers from two other lifeboats beforehand. The *Peel's* crew still took the survivors of Charles Lauriat's boat aboard even though it was risking the lives of all.[112] The decision to take aboard additional persons to an already overcrowded fishing vessel can be attributed more to the uncommon humanity of the vessel's crew - hardworking fishermen who risked drowning themselves to save the lives of those unfortunate souls onboard the *Lusitania*. Such selfless acts had and would continue to be replicated by crews of the rescue craft, *Lusitania's* lifeboats, and many of survivors themselves.

Among the survivors, American Charles Lauriat exemplified the best of the selfless and the brave. In addition, his compassion and powers of observation gave the world a rich account of what happened that afternoon. Lauriat himself noted the supreme and selfless generosity of the fisherman aboard the *Peel 12* that day - loaning the passengers blankets, starting a fire from the ship's heater and placing chilled persons

[110] Charles Lauriat, *The Lusitania's Last Voyage*, 21-22.

[111] Ibid., 32.

[112] Ibid.

around it, and giving exhausted survivors food and warm tea. As the first vessel on the scene, the captain of the *Peel 12* continued to attend to the rescue site searching for additional persons still in the water before eventually heading back to Queenstown.[113]

Fifty-two year old British passenger Elizabeth Duckworth had been rowing *Lusitania's* lifeboat number 21 before she was also intercepted by the *Peel 12*. She requested that the *Peel's* captain turn the fishing boat some distance off course to rescue additional survivors she believed were alive in the water. She was denied the request allegedly due to the *Peel's* manpower constraints. Upon being informed of the denial, Mrs. Duckworth and three male companions jumped back into their lifeboat and rowed out to rescue an additional 40 survivors from the water. Upon return to the *Peel*, Duckworth and her shipmates were welcomed by *Peel's* crew cheering her bravery and courage.[114] In all, the *Peel 12* took on 160 survivors, many with their legs hanging over the sides due to the cramped conditions before being transferred to the larger and more stable side paddlewheel *Flying Fish* for the return journey to Queenstown.[115]

As corroborated by the eyewitness accounts of the events surrounding the rescue of *Lusitania* survivors, the courage and will of passengers was not always able to overcome the long wait for rescue and the strength-sapping temperature of the water. The British Admiralty had failed to adequately protect the *Lusitania*. Despite knowledge of an active U-boat presence, the Admiralty also failed to prepare adequate contingencies

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[113] Ibid., 33

[114] Diana Preston, *Lusitania*, 261.

[115] Charles Lauriat, *The Lusitania's Last Voyage*, 35.

for a rescue mission if *Lusitania* was stricken. Vice Admiral Coke's possible order for *Lusitania* to divert away from finishing the voyage at Liverpool and head immediately to Queenstown was too little, too late. It is true that the ship sank exceptionally fast (18 minutes). This affected the number of lifeboats successfully launched as well as the number of lifejackets distributed and worn. These two factors alone do not necessarily explain *Lusitania's* massive loss of life. Had the Admiralty been better prepared for an incident they hoped to avoid, the evidence suggests more lives would have been saved.

There are several accounts of *Lusitania* crew members who, while struggling to save their own lives, took great personal risk in helping passengers into boats or retrieving for them floating objects on which could safely extend their exposure to the cold water. Lott Gadd was the ship's barber who had heroically, but unsuccessfully tried to lower a loaded lifeboat away from the ship. Gadd found himself in the water when the ship went down. In the aftermath, he came across a lifebuoy which he shared with four other survivors until a damaged collapsible lifeboat came into view. The five men boarded the lifeboat, selected Gadd as their leader, and began picking survivors out of the water.[116] A ship's officer, Charles Bowring and another officer climbed into a waterlogged lifeboat which they bailed out frantically with their hands. They then spent the next few hours diving in the water and bringing survivors back into the boat.[117] First Officer Arthur Jones took command of a damaged and overloaded boat after dragging passenger Isaac Lehmann for hours in the water. After handing over Lehmann and other

[116] Kent Layton, *Lusitania*, 324-325.

[117] Diana Preston, *Lusitania*, 253.

survivors to safety, Jones ordered both lifeboats back out to begin searching for and picking up additional survivors.[118] Able Seaman Thomas O'Mahoney and another seaman got aboard a collapsible boat and began picking up survivors out of the water.[119] Ship's Carpenter Neil Robertson helped a drowning American into a damaged, collapsible lifeboat.[120]

Not all crew members distinguished themselves with bravery. These included fireman and stokers in lifeboats despite the order for women and children first. Firemen and stokers worked in the bowels of the ship and would not have been expected to survive a torpedo strike such as the one that doomed *Lusitania*. Most of the engine room crew did not survive. Nor were they expected to. The fireman and stokers were observed slowly rowing away from the ship despite the instruction to move as quickly as possible to find survivors and to avoid the siphon of the ship as it went down. There are also incidences where small groups of able-bodied survivors as well as certain crewmembers refused to give up their lifebelts to passengers – including women and children.[121] During the Mersey Inquiry investigation into the sinking, a resigned Captain Turner hurt Cunard's seamanship credentials by expressing his disappointment in the conduct of his

[118] Ibid., 254.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster*, 207.

crew. He elaborated that the crew did not resemble much in the way of the sailors he knew from old times; they required much practice.[122]

Such examples however, were more the exception, rather than the rule. The mortality rate amongst the crew was nearly 60%. This meant that four hundred and thirteen of seven hundred original crew members lost their lives trying to save the ship. The implications were catastrophic as there were not enough experienced officers or senior crew members who survived the sinking to take charge of the situation and remedy the failure of the chain of command inherent among the lower ranking crewmembers.[123]

The story of the aftermath of the sinking of the *R.M.S. Lusitania* is heavily overshadowed by the seemingly preventable loss of life that occurred in the liner's final moments. On balance, the Admiralty's inability to protect one of the most valuable passenger ships in the world and to quickly respond to its mistake seems inexcusable. The captain and crew's inability to spot the torpedo and take evasive action, to slow the boat once it was hit, or to shift ballast in order to more quickly correct the list and safely launch lifeboats are the primary explanation for the severe loss of life. In each case, the captain's judgment or the crew's seamanship or both can be called into question.

The actions of lower ranking crewmembers such as the ship's Barber Lott Gadd or the Able Seaman Thomas O'Mahoney or the various passengers such as Charles Lauriat or Elizabeth Duckworth dominate the eyewitness accounts. Although rescue and recovery operations began immediately upon receipt of the *Lusitania's* distress signal,

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[122] Ibid., 205-206.

[123] Ibid., 193.

Queenstown was not prepared to rescue a ship in trouble that far out to sea. The Admiralty rescinded Vice Admiral Coke's orders that most likely would have affected the body count. Captain Turner neglected his orders regarding course and speed. Turner had furthermore lost his position in the morning fog, a circumstance that allowed U-20 to close quickly and strike with devastating results.

It seems, once in the water that rank lost all meaning. The crew of the *Lusitania* performed bravely and not without making the ultimate sacrifice to have others overcome the hand they were dealt. Rescuers and survivors themselves were the real heroes that day.

CHAPTER VIII

PUBLIC SENTIMENT & THE MARCH TOWARD WAR

An examination of American sentiment before and after *Lusitania* was destroyed is necessary to establish the role that the disaster and loss of life played in the American entrance into the war. The American press was a primary influence and registrar of public sentiment immediately following the attack.

In the Fall of 1914, some six months before the disaster, public sentiment in the United States regarding the war was that it was Europe's war to fight. Americans continued commerce with England, Germany, and the other nations at war. British, French, and early in the war German naval assets patrolled American ports along the eastern seaboard from international waters, The New York Times noted in August that two French cruisers (*Conde*, *Descartes*), three British (*Berwick*, *Essex*, and *Lancaster*), and three German (*Dresden*, *Strausburg*, and *Karlsruhe*) were off the New York and Boston coasts.[124] The British cruiser Essex had just finished escorting the White Star liner *Olympic* on the final leg of its journey across the Atlantic to New York harbor. In doing so, the newspaper noted that it sailed past the three German warships, which were clearly "outclassed".

[124] "Cunarder Slips Out; Will Pick Up British Cruisers as Escorts." *New York Times,* August 5, 1914.

Americans believed the superiority of the British Navy would be a deciding factor in the conduct and outcome of the war, and that superiority would insure safe passage of the commerce between Europe and the United States. However, they were occasionally reminded of the dangers of trans-Atlantic travel while traveling aboard passenger liners. On an August 5th *Lusitania* voyage, "all passengers were notified that all stateroom lights must be blanketed when the vessel passed Ambrose Channel." Furthermore, although "passengers were allowed on deck, they were warned that no lights must be shown."[125]

Trans-Atlantic passengers disembarking in America also carried perspectives on the war that the newspaper's elaborated on for a fairly disinterested public. "Sir James Barrie Looks for Long War" was the title of a page four article in the September 18th New York Times. Barrie was a British playwright visiting the United States. He fielded questions from reporters ranging from the technical (the kind of bullets the Germans were reported to be using) to the political (usefulness of peace talks). Barrie declared Germany "a magnificent nation" and speculated that the war was " a revolt against (Germany's systemic) militarism and the Emperor was not wholly to blame". This was a relieving and disarming testimony for a pacifist America.

Major Talbot Aldrich of Boston was a retired but distinguished US cavalry officer and in Belgium when the war began. He arrived in New York on board the *Lusitania* on September 17, 1914. The New York Times interviewed Aldrich and many others upon their departure from the ship. His assessment that "if not for the check at Liege, the

[125] Ibid.

Kaiser's army would have been in Paris within two weeks after the war started," was buried deep into its article – paragraph 17 of 19.[126]

The newspapers of the time also monitored German ocean liner traffic into and out of American ports. Another 1914 *Times* article in the same edition covering *Lusitania's* September arrival, highlighted German liners *Barbarossa* and *Brandenburg* eluding British and French cruisers. The *Brandenburg* slipped out of Philadelphia in August and was following a northern route to Trondhjem, Norway. Similarly, the *Barbarossa* of Lloyd Lines lay in Hoboken, New Jersey for many weeks before receiving clearance to move its 2,000 tons of coal to Europe. The *Barbarossa* slipped out of Hoboken to Gravesend Bay where she waited for English cruisers to leave the area.[127]

Prior to the outbreak of war, newspapers covered the *Lusitania* as a modern, technological marvel. This created an air of absolute confidence about the ship and Cunard itself. At the turn of the century, *Lusitania* was heralded as "The Greatest Steamship Ever Built."[128] Articles featured its size, speed, and safety accommodations – some of which were the result of the *Titanic* disaster some five years earlier. "Were *Lusitania* to be stood on its end it would almost equal the combined height of New York's tallest skyscrapers: the Park Row, the St Paul, and the Flat Iron."[129] Days after launch, engineers marveled at her horsepower (70,000) and indicated top speed (26.5

[126] "Sir James Barrie Looks for Long War," *New York Times,* September 18, 1914.

[127] "Barbarossa Slips Out." *New York Times,* September 18, 1914.

[128] "The Greatest Steamship Ever Built." *New York Times,* May 12, 1907.

[129] Ibid.

knots). Ironically, according to the New York Times, the "greatest luxury of travel promised in the ship is its absolute freedom from vibration – considered the greatest inconvenience to fast travel on the Atlantic."[130]

The breakthrough in passenger comfort and liner speed was the result of the enormous turbines designed specifically for *Lusitania*. These required considerable coal consumption and therefore oversized coalbunkers for storage. It is believed by some historians that the "second" torpedo strike was actually the thunderous explosion of one of *Lusitania's* massive coal bunkers. Provided that this assumption is correct, it is ironic that technology intended to extend the ultimate in passenger comfort, may have indirectly contributed to *Lusitania's* acute loss of life.

The *Lusitania's* many safety features were also celebrated by public record. Following the loss of the *Titanic*, *Volturno*, and the *Empress of Ireland*, several structural features as well as operating protocols were put into operation as requirements for passenger liners. For example, the *Lusitania* was built with a double bottom hull and wireless technology that could reach 100 miles in distress conditions.[131] In addition, *Lusitania* was engineered to have enough lifeboats for over one hundred percent of its passenger & crew capacity. This was a highly controversial provision, as noted by the New York Times in 1907.

> *Most experienced captains are against carrying one hundred percent capacity and say that such a large*

[130] "Luxurious Ocean Travel." *New York Times,* July 31, 1907.

[131] "Ocean Disasters are Teaching Many Safety Lessons." *New York Times,* June 7, 1914

number of boats on the upper decks would be impossible to fully deploy and in fact impede lifesaving due to overcrowding on the deck.[132]

Fresh from the *Titanic* disaster, the public may not have fully appreciated the referenced captain's caution. To the public, one can easily imagine the sentiment that the more lifeboats - the better. Unfortunately, the *Lusitania* reinforced the captain's prophecy.

Due to newspaper coverage prior to the *Lusitania* setting sail for Liverpool on the last voyage of her life, the *Lusitania* was a recognized, if not celebrated ship for most Americans. Britain's naval strength put her in control of the seas. Liners such as the *Lusitania* could easily outrun most German warships and submarines. The submarines themselves seemingly failed to halt big liners. "The general view in maritime circles is that the big ships with high speed run comparatively little danger from submarines."[133]. This view was in fact demonstrated by the U-20 itself during the same mission that sank the *Lusitania*, where Kapitanluetant Schweiger pursued and unsuccessfully fired upon an undisclosed White Star Line ship. The torpedo missed its target due to the high speed of its intended victim. The steamship lines themselves added to the air of invincibility by showing no alarm for the safety of their ships. Cunard reportedly said that it "saw no reason to make any alterations in its programed sailings" despite the warnings issued by

[132] Ibid.
[133] "Submarines Fail to Halt Big Liners." *New York Times,* February 3, 1915.

Germany.[134] Despite the explicit German warning to the *Lusitania* published in the New York Times on the day of her departure out of New York, few passengers canceled their trip.

With public opinion cultivated by newspaper coverage reflecting *Lusitania* as an "invincible" ship, together with the conflict overseas depicted as a long and wholly European war, American pacifism prevailed leading up to the *Lusitania* disaster. Immediately following the *Lusitania's* sinking, neither of these conditioned perspectives remained intact. The facts before then were that the United States was firmly a neutral nation, that *Lusitania* was a fast ship with an experienced crew, and that Germany had yet to establish submarine warfare as a significant weapons system to be feared. None of the major passenger lines had interrupted their cruise schedules nor reduced the number of crossings that they offered. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that only a half dozen cancellations were recorded for passage on the *Lusitania* after the German Embassy published an explicit warning. The warning was published in the New York Times the same day the ship left New York for Liverpool.

The coverage of the war in US newspapers seemed anecdotal by modern standards. Europe's conflicts were seemingly frequent; America's involvement in them was not. In the sixty-five year history between 1849 up to World War I, Europe experienced thirty wars and fewer than a dozen years of peace. The US was an ascending - but not yet established - naval power and its ability to project that power was not a broad consideration by the public. Before *Lusitania* went down, it is likely that Germany and

[134] Ibid.

Austria-Hungary's war with Britain and France seemed a distant and familiar curiosity to the average American.

Newspaper articles immediately following the disaster reflect American's surprise and disbelief that the *Lusitania* had actually been sunk. [135] The political implications of the disaster were preeminent immediately following news of the attack. Speculation and rumor filled the information vacuum created by distance and by the complicated rescue operation.

Perhaps the initial fascination with the politics of the attack - most specifically Washington's reaction to it - can be partially explained by the fact that the true scale of the disaster was not accounted for in the first days following the attack. Early Cunard accounts indicated that all on board had been saved. Given what the public and Cunard knew of the *Lusitania's* engineering and its crew, this was reassuring and not unexpected news. "This information was given out to the people waiting in the Cunard office and many of them went home"[135]

Cunard officials were also struggling with confirming the exact passenger manifest.[136] The newspaper reported that due to alterations and additions made close to launch, the exact passenger and crew count was not confirmed until the day after its sinking. It was then reported that there were 1,253 passengers from New York including some 200 transferred from the *Cameronia* in New York after she was placed under Admiralty control that morning for use as a merchant cruiser. The Admiralty-ordered

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[135] Ibid.

[136] "Cunard Office Here Beseiged for News; Fate of 1,918 on Lusitania Long in Doubt." *New York Times,* May 8, 1915.

transfer had the effect of delaying *Lusitania's* launch by two and one half hours. Historians put little relevance of the transfer other than adding to the *Lusitania's* death toll and revealing the extent to which the British Admiralty controlled private passenger ships.[137] However, authors Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan note that the fatalists contend that if *Lusitania* had not been delayed, her fateful rendezvous with U-20 may have been under different circumstances, if it would have happened at all.

Judging from newspaper accounts, foremost in the public interest on May 8th was the potential commercial implications of the disaster. Although an exact passenger count remained elusive, the American public were fully informed of the value of the ship and its cargo - to the dollar.[138] Headlines underscored the commercial losses and reported the insurance coverage carried by Cunard on *Lusitania* as well as the guarantees taken out by New York companies with goods and merchandise on board.[139] Coverage such as this may be attributed to the local concentration of risk. It was reported that over have the assets insured on the Lusitania were done so by New York firms.[140]

It would take the next several days before the public began to learn about the details of the attack from survivors' published accounts.[141] From these accounts, Americans were introduced to stories of survival, the ineffectiveness of lifeboats, and a good deal of speculation as to the missing's demise.[142]

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[137] Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster*, 91.

[138] "Liner and Cargo Worth $10, 735, 579." *New York Times*, May 8, 1915.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.
[141] "Hit By Three Torpedoes." *New York Times*, May 9, 1915.
[142] "Survivors Tell How They Escaped." *New York Times*, May 9, 1915.

It was perhaps an ironic admission by the New York Times that one of the most celebrated characteristics of the *Lusitania* – her speed – was in fact complicit in her lost of life.[143] Without the ability to reverse engines, a fast ship is difficult to slow. *Lusitania* was without recourse. It could neither speed up to cover the distance to a safe harbor (or intentional grounding) nor slow down enough to launch lifeboats. The public learned that their esteemed and "invincible" ship went down essentially without a fight in less than twenty minutes.

Newspapers began to shift coverage the following week and focused attention on the multiple acts of heroism witnessed or imagined by survivors and rescuers.[144] The public learned that half the ship's life boats were never effectively launched due to delay in orders given and the inability of the crew to level the ship[145] Reports detailed the great loss of life extracted by prolonged exposure in cold water[146]

The stories being relayed back to America were so incongruent to the public's perception of the ship, little attention was paid to the act of war the Germans had effected. In the succeeding days the newspapers instead sought to resolve how such a disaster could have been thrust upon such a magnificent ship. Headlines seemed to rule out some factors while still speculating on others.[147] The Captain's credentials - 46 years as a sailor - were buried deep in the newspaper and only made brief reference to.[148]

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143 "Speed of Lusitania Swamped Lifeboats." *New York Times*, May 9, 1915.
144 "Carried Down By Funnel." *New York Times*, May 10, 1915.
145 "Delay in Launching Boat." *New York Times*, May 11, 1915.
146 "Hours In The Water, Two Young Women Live." *New York Times*, May 10, 1915.
147 "Admiralty's Warning Named Danger Spot." *New York Times*, May 16, 1915.
148 "Liner Unprotected, Captain Complained." *New York Times*, May 8, 1915.

Finally, as the days rolled on, public sentiment was steered away from the crime or the perpetrator and was instead directed towards the Admiralty, Cunard, and the ship's crew[149] Experts crticized the ship's course and the crew's discipline[150]

On the 18th of May, the British Board of Trade announced a formal investigation of the circumstances attending the loss of the *Lusitania* would be held beginning June 15, 1915. The investigation – later known as the Mersey Inquiry – produced over three hundred pages of testimony from the ship's officers and crew, from survivors, and from naval experts. The Inquiry and its final report concluded that "the whole blame for the cruel destruction of life rested with those who plotted and with who committed the crime."[151]

On one level, such a conclusion was - if not predictable - politically convenient. It obscured or deflected accountablilities of the Admiralty, of Cunard, and of Lusitania's leadership and crew. It had the effect of shifting the narrative of the incident from one of *disbelief* to one of *outrage*. The Mersey Inquiry, however intended, proved to set a cornerstone in the argument that would eventually help turn American public sentiment toward the war in Europe.

The Mersey Inquiry carried out its work over six hearings across four weeks' time. The Inquiry called 36 witnesses and the British Wreck Commissioner himself Lord Baron Mersey asked and interpreted all questions and responses. Some of the hearings allowed cameras present which seemed to serve to enhance the drama unfolding. The fact that the

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149 Ibid.
150 "Doubt One Torpedo Sank The Cunarder." *New York Times*, May 8, 1915
151 *A Formal Inquiry into the Loss of the Steamship Lusitania,* sess 364.

commission focused little on the action and inaction of the Captain and crew had the effect of stopping short of completely exonerating Captain Turner and his crew.

> *No doubt there were mishaps in handling the ropes of the boats and in other such matters, but there was, in my opinion, no incompetence or neglect. I am satisfied that the crew behaved well throughout and worked with skill and judgment.*
>
> *I find that the conduct of the masters, the officers, and the crew was satisfactory. They did their best under difficult and perilous circumstances.*[152]

Some historians such as Eric Sauder and J. Kent Layton view the Mersey commission with disappointment. It fed the newspaper's appetite for spectacle, but its conclusions were circumstantial at best. The public continued to suspect incompetence on the part of Turner for failure to follow all the safety guidelines. Lord Mersey acknowledged that the Captain "was fully advised as to the means which in the view of the Admiralty were best calculated to avert the disaster."[153] The Commission also concluded that in some respects the captain did not follow the advice given to him. However, the Commission suggested that the Admiralty's instructions were meant for serious and careful consideration, not as uncontested orders. The captain was expected to exercise his skilled judgment when it came to the difficult questions arising from the navigation of his ship. The concluding Mersey report seemed to be saying that the Admiralty was not to be held to account because the safe passage of any ship depended

[152] Ibid., sess 366.

[153] *Ibid.,* sess 373.

on the judgment of its captain. Commissioner Mersey further suggested that Captain Turner and the crew of the Lusitania should not be held responsible for his judgment in the Lusitania disaster because the circumstances were difficult and *"They did their best in difficult and perilous circumstances and their best was good"*.[154] This would have hardly seemed a sufficient explanation to those trying to account for what happened:

> *He exercised his judgment for the best. It was the judgment of a skilled and experienced man, and although others may have acted differently and perhaps more successfully, he ought not, in my opinion, be blamed.*[155]

Following the *Lusitania* disaster, American public opinion was shaped by newspaper coverage and by the Mersey Inquiry. The fact that their were almost 200 Americans onboard the *Lusitania* when she was torpedoed was buried deep in the early editions of the New York Times.[156] In contrast, articles on the potential insurance losses and speculation on challenges to Alfred Vanderbuilt's *Last Will and Testament* captured page one attention.[157] The Mersey report addressed various popular conspiracies such as the speed of the ship, the deployment of safety measures, and suspicions of *Lusitania's* cargo. Most of the Admiralty's orders remained sealed during the commission (and for some decades afterward). Into this information vacuum evolved new theories including

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[154] *Ibid.,* sess 366.

[155] *Ibid.,* sess 373.

[156] "Frohman's Body Recovered." *New York Times*, May 9, 1915.

[157] "The Day at Queenstown." *New York Times*, May 10, 1915.

the Admiralty intentionally putting Americans in harm's way in order to drag American industrial and military might into the war.

These all suggest that in 1915, Americans saw *Lusitania's* fate more as a nautical disaster than an attack; more similar to *Titanic* (1912) than the *Maine* (1898). The loss of American life did not ignite outrage or a direct move toward war. That would come some two years later. Instead, *Lusitania* was a jarring wake-up call to isolationist America that the war in Europe did indeed have consequences for the United States. It reinforced the view that it might be a long war in which it would be difficult to remain neutral throughout. Finally, for America it introduced a brutal and deadly weapon (the submarine) which called into question the long-established rules of war at sea and paradoxically challenged both the country's isolation as well as its ability to project its rising military and industrial power. Two years later America would declare war on Germany immediately following the sinking of four American merchant ships by U-boats that had violated the neutrality of the United States.

Politically, the *Lusitania* disaster was an incident that supported US President Wilson's emerging formulation of an international body to resolve disputes and attribute accountability. Tactically, May 7, 1915 marked an inflection point in Germany's conduct of submarine warfare and the American public's interest in it. For the next twelve months, average Allied naval losses to U-boat attacks doubled to 150,000 tons each month. (Exhibit III, Page 43) The expansion of the German U-boat program continued to escalate until April, 1917 – a month in which Allied forces lost nearly 900,000 tons of

maritime assets. Perhaps not unrelated, on April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson asked Congress to declare war on Germany and the United States entered World War I.

CHAPTER IX

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

By any account, the sinking of the *Lusitania* by a single torpedo launched from Germany's U-20 is a significant historical event. The ultimate accountability for the remarkable loss of life fell on the German war machine. However, this research has served to separate the act of war from the actions of the ship's command and control infrastructure and the seamanship of its crew. This distinction is made underscoring the thesis that more lives could have and *should have* been saved. While histories of the *Lusitania* do not lay culpability at the feet of the crew and captain, both should be held to account for the elevated loss of life in the hostile sinking of this magnificent ship on May 7, 1915.

It was a tragedy foretold by its instigator. The German government issued warnings before *Lusitania* sailed and did so in a very public way. The British and American government, the ship's operating company Cunard, as well as some of *Lusitania's* passengers and crew were aware of the threat. For example, the British Admiralty - who controlled all Allied ships within or passing through the warzone – took the threat seriously enough to commandeer the *Cameronia* and transfer its passengers to the *Lusitania*.

The ship was a technological marvel of its day and had compelling advantages over its pursuer. Unfortunately, *Lusitania's* considerable advantages were neutralized by negligence and misjudgment, by the weather, and by overriding commercial interests. The U-20's effectiveness was enhanced by *Lusitania's* misfortune and ineptitude as well as certain inaction on the part of Admiralty.

The bridge was warned of the approaching torpedo in time to affect evasive action, but did not hear the alert. Despite eight or more look-outs posted by the captain, calm seas and clear visibility; only one seaman – assigned to the forecastle - spotted the torpedo with enough time to avert the strike. That seaman neglected his duty after only one alert to the bridge, and left his post without ensuring *Lusitania's* officers acknowledged receipt. The remaining look-outs saw the torpedo approximately twelve seconds from impact, too little time to avoid the disaster.

Although she sank quickly, *Lusitania* was outfitted with abundant safety equipment and modern design features that should have allowed for the safe evacuation of all its passengers and crew (those who survived the torpedo's impact). These features were well publicized and practiced with help from the lessons learned from the legendary *Titanic's* sinking years earlier. Double-hulled with flooding-compartmentalization further secured by water-tight bulkheads, *Lusitania's* design made her fast enough to avoid attack and doubly seaworthy should an attack catch her by surprise. In other words, *Lusitania* (like *Titanic*) was thought unsinkable. Eighteen minutes after being struck by a single torpedo, the presumably unsinkable *Lusitania* slipped out of sight beneath the waves.

It is unclear whether it was this misplaced confidence in the ship itself or other circumstances that delayed the order by Captain William Thomas Turner to abandon ship, but *Lusitania's* crew had but ten minutes to effect an order involving almost two thousand people (1,959). The crew was unable to mobilize passengers with sufficient instruction to properly don most of the 2,100 lifejackets – the primary lifesaving instrument on board, although evidence exists of some heroic crewmembers sacrificing their vests to save others.

With so many passengers without properly secured lifejackets, the deployment of *Lusitania's* (abundant) lifeboat capacity was paramount. Ironically, two of the ship's considerable advantages – her size and speed - conspired to further limit abandonment procedures.

The crew had properly followed Admiralty orders when the ship entered the designated submarine war zone to swing all davits for the twenty-two lifeboats out away from the ship so that they could quickly be lowered in the event of an attack. These boats had a rated capacity of 1,400 passengers: the capacity in and of themselves to save over 70% of those onboard the Lusitania. A similar order to unlatch retaining harnesses of the forty-eight collapsible lifeboats was over-ridden by Captain Turner. As a result, nearly all the collapsible lifeboat capacity (totaling over 2,000 passengers) went down still strapped to the ship.

Because of the size and speed of the ship, the captain and his crew were unable to control the list of the Lusitania or slow its surface speed enough to immediately launch its lifeboats. The crew had difficulty organizing panicked passengers who were crowding

the upper decks desperate to get into lifeboats. As the ship slowed, its list increased until it was no longer practical to deploy any boats from the port side. The passengers were told to disembark from all lifeboats on the port side of the ship and those that did rushed into the pandemonium on the starboard side. In the end, the crew was able to deploy only six of the twenty-two high-capacity lifeboats.

Once in the water, those without lifejackets or some other means of floatation, did not have long to live. As the *Lusitania* lurched toward the bottom, she took many in the water nearby down with her. Others would succumb to exhaustion or hypothermia, lose consciousness, and drown. Because of the remote position of the ship and the Admiralty's failure to provide escort or increase patrols, the first rescue vessels were at least two hours away. Hypothermia would set in for all those in the water – regardless of floatation - within the hour of their submergence into the sea.

It was a tragedy that might very well have been avoided entirely. While the captain and crew of the *Lusitania* knew well the general threat of a submarine attack along the route they were to travel, they were not given a warning of imminent attack from U-20 Captain Schwieger that had been customary and may have saved countless lives. That custom had been ceased unilaterally by the Germans upon the British Admiralty's announcement of a broad merchant ship armament program and along with defensive maneuvers that appeared to target specifically the vulnerabilities of German submarines. The Admiralty had failed to anticipate the implications of its merchant ship armament program and astonishingly announced it before most ships were outfitted. It

also failed to provide escort to a large and declared target as she moved into an area of known lethal submarine activity.

The owner of the *Lusitania*, and the commercial interest to which the captain ultimately answered, was the Cunard Line. Cunard had instructed the captain to conserve fuel and refrain from top speed. This conflicted with Admiralty instructions and contributed to the adverse course and steerage choices Turner ultimately made. These in turn, neutralized *Lusitania's* advantages in avoiding a surprise submarine attack and allowed an inferior vessel with a skilled and motivated captain (U-20), to gain the tactical attack position it did against a much faster ship.

Ultimately, it was Captain Turner's seamanship that put *Lusitania* in harm's way. Once there, he and his crew failed to acknowledge the approaching torpedo in time to take evasive action. Once struck, he delayed the abandon ship order and his crew failed to control the list or speed of the ship. Despite the known threat, over three quarters of the *Lusitania's* lifeboat capacity was never deployed.

The captain was one of only a few officers to survive. He was washed off the deck, fully prepared to go down with his ship. Unlike most of his passengers, Turner had a lifejacket on from the time he issued the abandon ship order until he was picked up in the water by one of six surviving lifeboats. Although he endured the Mercy Inquiry, his actions and his judgment were only quietly criticized. He would command only one other ship – a converted small merchant vessel that was also sunk in a German submarine attack – before he was retired to desk duty.

No matter how light-handed the Mercy Inquiry, its unambiguous verdict of German accountability for *Lusitania's* elevated death count would later prove useful to the Allied recruitment effort. In this indirect way, *Lusitania's* captain and crew's series of escalating failures would indirectly help mobilize the American war machine that ultimately turned the tide of World War I.

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